

Chapter Fifty-two – Higgs

Monday, June 11th, Ft. Carson, CO...

“Colonel Jamison, did we receive an invitation from *The Ark* to attend July 4th festivities?” General Robinson asked.

“Yes sir,” the Colonel replied, “We received it earlier this morning. There was a special request attached to the request by Major Olsen.”

“What did the kid want?” Robinson smiled.

“Officially, he’s requested that you assign Higgs for a week, as Special Liaison to help organize the event.”

“And unofficially?” Robinson inquired.

“I think he wants to bend the Sgt. Major’s ear on infantry tactics,” Jamison replied.

“The kid’s on the ball, sure enough,” the General smiled, “I pulled his training records. Did one hell of a job in armored school. Ended up driving the unit commander’s Abrams. Then they made him a loader and he was outstanding. Moved him to gunner and he maintained perfect gunnery scores. Did the exercise at Ft. Irwin and earned a special notation in his fitness report. So, they sent him to NCO Academy and he was first in his class. He was up for Staff Sergeant when his unit received orders for Kosovo. He breezed through the limited infantry training at Ft. Stewart.

“Was in-flight when the bomb went off in Washington. I have no doubt that he knew of the president’s recall order, but had I been in his position, I’d have probably done the same thing. Herb Johnson was one squared away SEAL, according to his record. He had some very nice things to say about how young Olsen helped organize *The Ark’s* defenses.”

“Higgs was very impressed,” General Robinson continued. “He likes the boy, says he’s real sharp. You know as well as I do that Higgs is extremely hard to impress. Sure, send Higgs down a week early, but fill him in on the Major’s real reason for the request.”

“The Sgt. Major will never let on that he knows,” Jamison replied, “That request will sit very well with him, too. You know how he’s always quoting the Dirty Harry movie with that, *a man got’s to know his limitations’* stuff.”

Thus it came to be that on 27 June 07 at 0600 hours, Sgt. Major Eugene Higgs presented himself to Major Derek Olsen. The discussion concerning the party preparations lasted for the duration of a single cup of coffee. Then, Higgs got down to business reviewing infantry tactics with his new charge.

Backing up to June 11th, The Ark I, main room...

Ron limped into the security office. Yesterday was awful; he could barely get out of bed. At least today, he could walk. Clarence sat reading an old magazine and drinking coffee.

“Good Morning Ron!” Clarence mirthfully greeted, “Didn’t see you at all yesterday; how are you?”

“I’ll live, barely,” Ron muttered as he helped himself to coffee. “I think my days with the Pony Patrol are over.”

“We always have room for one more in the 10th Calvary,” Clarence offered.

“Yeah right,” Ron gave Clarence the evil eye.

“Good morning guys,” Gary said entering the security office and taking a cup of coffee.

“How are you?” Clarence cheerfully inquired.

“Saddle sore, but otherwise fine,” Gary replied.

“I invited Ron to join us at the 10th Calvary,” Clarence announced. “Oh, by the way, we’ve acquired some motorcycles for the patrols; more versatile than a truck and faster than an ATV. Ron, you want me to get someone to mount your scabbard on a motorcycle?”

Ron just groaned. “I had Derek send an invite for the troops for the July 4th party,” he announced.

“Did anyone get the ice cream freezers yet?” Clarence asked.

“Not yet partner,” Ron replied, “Why?”

“I was just thinking that we should pick up some ice machines, too,” Clarence responded, “You need ice to make ice cream.”

“We’ll do it this afternoon,” Ron replied.

After lunch, Ron, Clarence and Gary, decked out as cowboys, got in a pickup and, with an escort, headed to Colorado Springs. They located the ice cream freezers Ron had left behind and several more. They picked up an ice machine, loaded it and headed to Pueblo. In Pueblo, they loaded a second ice machine and nearly 30 ice cream machines. On their way back to The Ark, Ron pulled the pickup to a halt. The men got out and Ron pointed to a Cell tower.

“Do you think we could dismantle that thing and move it to *The Ark*?” he asked.

I suppose, we could,” Clarence answered, “What do you have in mind?”

“Well,” Ron replied, we’re burning a lot of fuel running all of the patrols. If we could move that tower to the center of the complex, we could probably watch all 6 sections from the one tower. We could cut out the patrols and establish permanent ready response teams. Sort like the Navy’s alert 15 fighters on carriers.”

“Another thing we could do would be to install repeaters and radio antennas,” Gary offered. “That would sure increase the range of our line-of-sight radios.”

They boarded the pickup and finished their journey to *The Ark*. For the next several days, Gary sorted through all of the radio equipment they had acquired. He found a repeater that would cover the frequencies used for their business band radios. He set it aside for later use. He also found antennas and set them aside. He decided to ask Damon to look through the radios for VHF and UHF repeaters.

Beginning June 12th, Cell Tower activities...

A crew of men began the arduous task of dismantling the 3-legged cell tower. Each section was removed and lowered onto the bed of a waiting semi. They were transported back to *The Ark* and laid out in order of their disassembly. While the tower was being dismantled and transported, Clarence and John installed a concrete foundation, adjacent to the tunnel. After they had the tower erected and observation platform built, they would construct an entrance into the tunnel.

They decided to build the platform out of lightweight materials. It wasn’t planned to man the tower in the event of an actual conflict. Clarence located a heavy-duty winch and asked Chris to assemble a one-person platform that could be raised and lowered as a crude elevator. The oversized winch held 400’ of cable, more than they needed. A hidden switch in one of the cell legs would activate it and the motor on the trap door using auto-reversing circuitry. Push the button once, the trap door opened and the basket lowered. Push the button a second time, the basket raised and the trap door closed. The switch circuits were wired in a 3-way configuration, one in the observation tower, and the other in a leg at the base of the tower.

June 27th...

The Sgt. Major had arrived early and was in Derek’s office. Clarence was overseeing the tower construction which was a little over ½ complete. Chris was busy putting finishing touches on the observation platform to be installed on the tower. The platform was built in sections and it could be disassembled, raised to the top of the tower and reassembled. Damon busied himself making sure that the repeater equipment was ready to go. Gary and Ron sat in lawn chairs ‘supervising’ the project. Late in the day, they treated themselves to an ice-cold bottle of home brew. This ‘supervising’ business was hard

work; a man could work up a powerful thirst.

They started making ice cream on July 1st, 1,000 plus people could eat a lot of ice cream. The surprising discovery of a cooler of cold beer in Pueblo would permit them to host the beverages. Wanting to make sure that the beer was still good they tapped a keg early and made it available to the tower workers at the end of the day. The beer had sat in the cooler, without refrigeration the entire time the electricity had been off. Everyone agreed that they had better, but it would do.

Sgt. Major 'Crusty' decided that the young Major was as sharp as a tack. He listened. He asked intelligent questions. He rapidly grasped the 'why' of unit tactics. "Would have made one hell of a noncom," Higgs thought to himself, "It's a shame that they had to go and make him an officer. At least the boy knows what it means to be a grunt." Training ended earlier than planned. Higgs had figured that he would have to cover everything twice. With the Major's permission, he began to assist Ron and Gary 'supervising' the tower construction.

Clarence had planned on cutting into the top of the tunnel. Higgs suggested that they dig down and expose the side. He took leave of Ron and Gary and showed Clarence what he would do if it were his decision. Clarence must have figured 'what the hell'; he got men started digging right away.

Higgs directed Clarence to dig a 4' square hole to the base of the tunnel and construct a framework within the hole. He then had Clarence construct a 4' square platform about 8" deep. The platform was lined with plastic, filled with earth, and then covered with sod. Normally held open with 4 hydraulic jacks, the sod cover could be lowered into place if needed and you couldn't detect the hole next to the tunnel. A 2' square hole was sawed in the wall of the tunnel and Chris was directed to construct a door using 8 of the ¾' plates.

Hinged on the inside, the door could be slammed shut and a couple of hinged beams dropped across it to make it as solid as the concrete. Even if 'they' found the entrance, 'they' would play hell getting through the door. As extra insurance in the event 'they' did, Higgs had Herb plant charges in the area of the door and extending several feet in either direction. If required, the tunnel could be collapsed.

July 4th, 2007, The Ark...

For the first time, the 4th of July party would be held at *The Ark 2*. Both sides of a whole beef was slowly roasting over a fire pit; four hogs were on a spit over a second. The troops from Ft. Carson arrived early and helped the residents as they hurried to finish their preparations. For the first time, too, the soldiers were all dressed in 'civies', their equipment aboard several extra trucks. The General presented Ron with a box of good cigars and Jacob with a large gift box of gourmet jams and jellies.

"This 4th of July," Lt. General, 'call me Milt' Robinson said, "Will mark the end of an era

and the beginning of the next. Gentlemen, this time next year, we should be operating under a new Constitution. Already, some factories are beginning to reopen. The revised Constitution has been distributed to all settlements. I would expect the states to begin voting on ratification by early September. Of course, when that happens, we'll have politicians to deal with again."

Since most of the physical infrastructure was intact, Milt, supposed aloud, "We'll probably have the media to deal with, too."

"That won't be too bad Milt," Gary responded, "As soon as a few reporters get tossed in prison for violating the new free speech provisions, we're bound to see a new media emerge."

"I wouldn't be so sure Gary," Clarence chimed in, "The first thing the surviving journalists are going to do is start complaining about how they lost all of their rights."

"That won't last long," Ron laughed, "Ten minutes into their resumed careers, they'll have slandered, libeled or invaded someone's privacy. I only hope we have enough prisons to hold them."

"The only thing I worry about," Milt said, "Is the band of marauders that disappeared. It's as if they dropped off the face of the planet. We've looked and we can't find them."

The military should have looked harder or smarter. When it became apparent that they would be destroyed by the military the second band of marauders formed their own enclave and, from all outward appearances, were just another group of survivors. They were biding their time. The day would come, they reasoned, when everyone's guard would be down and they could extend out from their Oklahoma base. In the meantime, the hardened criminals and military deserters played the game, learning to farm and support themselves. They had recently accepted a military liaison to help in their defense.

When the ball games were finished and everyone had destroyed the mounds of food, the ice cream and strawberries were brought out. Clarence snuck off and filled his bowl from a freezer that he had left churning in his home earlier in the day. He wanted FRESH ice cream to go with his FRESH strawberries. He ended up making 3 trips to his home to refill his bowl. Unfortunately, the last of the strawberries were served just after he had prepared his second bowl.

After dinner and desert, Milt remarked that the tower was coming along nicely and wanted to know when it would be completed.

"I expect it'll be another week or more," Clarence announced shoveling the last spoonful of ice cream into his mouth. "Any particular reason you want to know?"

"No Clarence, I was just curious," Milt replied.

As the sun began to set, the troops climbed aboard the trucks and headed back to Ft. Carson.

Chapter Fifty-three – The States

The gardens were yielding especially well during 2007, a bumper crop was being harvested. The Ladies were now relegated to the role of supervising the canning operations, training a new generation of would be homemakers. The men busied themselves with chores, mostly; there were enough young people growing up to handle most of the routine work. On Saturdays, a flea market, of sorts, was held to allow residents to trade their 'extras' for things they couldn't produce for themselves.

The residents of the combined settlement ratified the new Constitution without serious dissent. A few of the younger people from *The Ark 1* had some questions, however, when it had been explained how things 'used to be' and how they 'would be different', the dissent faded. Jacob was selected to represent the settlement at the legislative session scheduled for the first Monday in September.

Construction of the observation post was completed as Clarence had predicted. It was equipped with a spotting scopes mounted on each side. All of the radio equipment was installed and operational. It was manned 24/7 by two persons. Everyone who had been previously assigned to roving patrols underwent several weeks of intensive training and soon each compound could field about half of its respective population as a highly trained militia. Sgt. Major Higgs was invited to provide postgraduate training, but he left after 2 days saying there was nothing more HE could teach them.

The assembled Colorado representatives ratified the new Constitution by an 85% favorable margin. Had some sheeple survived? Nationally, only Illinois, California, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York failed to ratify the new document. Apparently the citizens of those states were put off by the revisions to the 2nd and possibly 1st amendments.

The only state to vote 100% for ratification was, interesting enough, Oklahoma. The provisions establishing Congress, and the Presidency had not changed. A nominal change was made to the Federal Judiciary, which, when applied, would reduce the number of federal circuits and the number of Supreme Court judges to 5.

The separate states then revised and adopted their Constitutions. Not surprisingly, the 6 states failing to ratify the new Constitution had a lot of difficulty with their particular Constitutions. California and Maryland insisted on attempting to regulate firearms. As a result, several members of those state assemblies were arrested, given a summary trial and imprisoned. The other 4 states immediately adopted reasonable Constitutions. The old institutions such as Commonwealths disappeared. California and New York enclaves appointed new representatives. They, too, were suddenly able to pass reasonable Constitutions.

The Military worked diligently and was able to restore public radio, creating a National Public Radio Network. Television, they claimed, was 'a couple of years off'. Immediately, a news anchor made a comment about Michael Jackson, asserting that "the man

was obviously guilty” and should be in prison’. He had concrete proof that the jury had been bribed. At his trial, the anchor was unable to deliver the proof and he joined the New York representatives in prison. The news suddenly became a dull recital of facts, absent any speculation.

The group in Oklahoma decided it was time to test the waters. They sent a man, a woman and two kidnapped children that they had been keeping alive for this moment to an adjoining settlement. The man and woman were most convincing, describing how they had escaped from the marauders months ago and were just now finding a settlement.

Could they please, please be considered for membership? Given the condition of the people, their tattered clothing, haggard looks, and obvious needs of the children, the group admitted the newcomers on a provisional basis. The newcomers soon ingratiated themselves with the members of the settlement. The man, a former radio technician, volunteered to pull the graveyard radio shift.

A few nights later, that man generously took coffee to all of the guards because he had a few free minutes. When the guards were asleep, the marauders entered the compound and killed every resident. After stripping the compound of every bit of evidence of habitation, they took the bodies and the plunder back to their compound. They dug a pit and buried the bodies. The plunder, added to their existing supplies, greatly improved their material situation.

Systematically, the group repeated the same ruse, slowly eliminating settlements. They were extremely careful to pick settlements in a random fashion and only if two settlements were so close as to know each other would they attack more than a single settlement in an area. They no longer had to farm, but several people were kept busy to maintain their illusion.

They hit settlements in Oklahoma, north Texas, northeast New Mexico, Kansas and western Arkansas. When the representative returned to the settlement from the state assembly, he or she would be dumbfounded to learn that the settlement had been shut down and the people had apparently moved. Invariably, he or she would check with other settlements in the area and learn nothing. Eventually, the representative would contact the military and the group’s absence would be added to the increasing Missing Groups List. Had the marauders limited themselves to groups surrounding them, one could have eventually discerned their location by connecting all of the locations with a series of lines.

These were 'good' people, after all, didn't they have a representative in the Oklahoma Assembly; they had a military liaison and when rumors of a missing group surfaced, they asked the military liaison for assistance. They even increased their security to ward off a possible threat.

The liaison, a naïve young Lieutenant, was smitten with a lovely 28-year-old woman

who had been with the group since its inception. A twice-convicted murderer, she played the man for all he was worth. She slept with the man to perfect the illusion, but more frequently than not, she'd spike his drink and explain that he'd fallen asleep, perhaps a bit too much wine, she'd ask? It never occurred to the Lieutenant that the groups foraging trips coincided with another settlement going missing. Had he made the connection, the group would have argued coincidence; after all, not all of the group had left, had they?

The reports made their way, eventually, to Ft. Carson. General Robinson was certain that the missing settlements were victims of the missing marauders. Brigadier Jamison started a map, inserting a map pin for each missing settlement. Try as he might, he could find no pattern to the ever-increasing small red map pins. Nevertheless, word was sent to all liaison officers to heighten the alert status of their settlements.

The Ark was actually quite famous, as fame goes. They had successfully stopped more attacks with fewer casualties than any other settlement. Sometimes, a rumor was attached to the fame of the settlement, suggesting that they were so good because they had something to protect. Rumors are sometimes wishful thinking, sometimes a bit of truth mixed with a lot of imagination, and occasionally a little too accurate.

One of the cons, an escapee from Colorado swore that he had heard that the settlement, called *The Ark*, had been started by a bunch of wackos from California and that they had so much money that they had to have their Gold and Silver shipments delivered to them by armored car.

They didn't have an exact location for the settlement, only the Pueblo area. Their representative on a leave from the Assembly, reported that he had heard that *The Ark* was located southwest of Pueblo on Highway 78. The cons sent their version of a LRRP to locate and investigate *The Ark*. The LRRP moved into Pueblo and kept watch, sooner or later, they reasoned, someone from *The Ark* was bound to show up in Pueblo.

And, just as they expected, eventually someone did. Major Olsen and Sergeant Walker were ordered to report to Ft. Carson. Their passage through Pueblo accompanied by two armed Hummers did not go unnoticed. The con's LRRP was about to shine the event on when one of them pointed out that the drivers of the armed Hummers were civilians, not military. When the convoy returned, as surely it must, they intended to follow it and see if it headed down Highway 78.

Brigadier Jamison briefed Derek on the missing settlements, showing him the map. There was no clear pattern that Derek could see, either. They discussed options and concluded that *The Ark* was probably as well or better prepared to handle an assault than Ft. Carson, itself. However, as an added measure of insurance, Jamison offered to send Higgs back with Derek. Another pair of hands couldn't hurt, could they?

Derek jumped at the chance to have the Sergeant Major back at *The Ark*. If they were to be attacked whom better than SM 'Crusty' to join the defense. Besides, he really liked

the veteran soldier and was eager to learn all he could from a combat vet like the Sergeant Major.

When it came time to leave, Higgs insisted that Walker drive the 2½ ton truck of 'a little something extra' that he had organized. He, the Sergeant Major, would lower himself, wink, wink, to drive that young pup back to *The Ark*. Walker was to just follow along like a good little Sgt. and 'be sure' to maintain proper convoy distance. They passed through Pueblo, never realizing that they had picked up a shadow. The small convoy drove on to *The Ark*, and the convict LRRP suddenly stopped about 6 miles from *The Ark*. One of them had caught a brief glimpse of what looked to be an observation tower.

What they may have lacked in formal training, the cons had in cunning. They were properly equipped as befits any LRRP including cammo gear appropriate to the area for this time of year. They parked their Hummer and covered it with cammo netting. They spent a full day moving toward *The Ark*. The men observed the two compounds for several days. From all outward appearances, the reputation of *The Ark* was undeserved. Certainly, the group had an observation tower, but little other security was evident. They decided to return to Oklahoma and report their findings.

The cons would have gone unnoticed were it not for a fluke circumstance. Lloyd had made some minor upgrades to his sailplane and was flying it in a large 5-mile radius circle. Damon and he had upgraded the planes radios in hopes of improving the planes operating range. Having completed the 5-mile radius circle, Lloyd decided to try a 6-mile radius circle.

He stood in the observation tower and directed the plane outward another mile. Just as he was about to complete the second circle, Lloyd thought he spotted 4 men moving away from *The Ark*. He notified Herb and began to orbit the men, eventually observing them uncover a Hummer and drive towards Pueblo. Herb had gotten to the Observation tower in time to see the men board the Hummer and leave.

"That's very strange," he thought, "I'd better check with Derek."

He rode the makeshift elevator to the ground and proceeded to the MCC. Don was there, visiting with the deputy on duty. Herb grabbed Don and motioned for him to follow.

"Do you Army folks have any recon teams out?" Herb asked.

Higgs jumped to his feet, instantly alert. Derek replied, "Not that I'm aware of, why do you ask?"

"Lloyd was doing some test flights on the modified sailplane and he spotted what appeared to be a military LRRP traveling away from *The Ark*, Herb replied, "I got there just in time to see them pull the cammo off a Hummer and drive north."

Higgs was the first to speak, "Walker, get your young butt in here! Major, I recommend that we notify command of this incident immediately."

"Yes Sgt. Major?" Walker asked, "Do you need something?"

"Walker," Derek said, "We've had an incident and we believe that command should be notified immediately. Get on the radio and have Herb pass on the information to command."

Higgs just smiled, especially at the use of the term 'we'.

The cons returned to Pueblo and laid low. Better they should wait a day in case they were spotted. Besides, that rich luscious target wasn't going anywhere. As a consequence of the cons carefulness, the flight of F-22's scrambled out of Colorado Springs found no evidence of any intruders.

General Robinson, despite any confirmation of the cons presence, forwarded a report to his superiors. Herb and Derek, ever cautious, notified both compounds that they were on a heightened state of alert. No Yellow Alert was declared, but the militia members put themselves on an informal Yellow Alert anyway. Lloyd was told to gather his crew of modelers and maintain a 24/7 watch of the area. The date was October 15, 2007.

Having avoided detection, or so they thought, the cons departed for Oklahoma after dark, totally unaware of the R-45A Unmanned Combat Air Vehicle, a development of the Bird of Prey (Aurora) program during the 1990's. Developed by Lockheed, later Boeing, the stealth plane first came into service in 2004. It was loitering over the Trinidad area keeping an eye on Colorado's southern border.

It spotted and was then directed to follow the Hummer. Near the end of its operating range, theUCAV was forced to return to Colorado Springs and the Hummer was last observed turning east on US 160, aka state Highway 389, heading towards Pritchett Comanche National Grassland. A flight of F-22's was unable to locate the vehicle when they arrived on the scene.

The cons arrived at their settlement late the next day, having stopped for the night after turning east. They carefully outlined what they had observed, the Observation Tower, the apparent lack of security and the fact that they had made a 'clean getaway' unobserved by another living soul.

After several days of discussion, the group decided to become a missing settlement themselves. They killed the Lieutenant, buried his body, and loaded all evidence of their existence onto their vast fleet of vehicles. They departed in two's and three's, traveling only at night, and arrived in Trinidad, just as the first full blizzard of the season began. Trinidad would be a good place, they decided, to winter over.

Despite their heightened state of alert, the residents of *The Ark* continued their harvest

and by the first of November were buttoned up tight for the winter. Having free time on their hands for the first time in months, the mechanically inclined men took time to fabricate a larger grain mill more suited to the needs of a community of their size. The dozens of motor driven County Living Grain Mills that were worn nearly beyond repair were finally retired. The new mill could produce as much flour in a couple of hours as they had been able produce in an entire day. Perhaps, they thought, we can sell flour to the Army.

Chapter Fifty-four – Marauders

Thanksgiving Day, November 22, 2007, The Ark...

They had a lot to be thankful for this year. Several new babies, a bountiful harvest, a new Constitution, and hopefully, peace at last. No turkey, but home cured hams, roasted chicken, roast beef and pork, lamb, fresh cheeses, a truly magnificent feast. The compounds held brief religious observances, and then came together at Central to celebrate the holiday. After the meal, the women sent the men off to visit so that they could clear the tables.

Jacob, Bob, Ron, Gary, Clarence and Herb gathered in the security office. They discussed the security scare of a few weeks back.

“If these guys were with the missing marauder group,” Herb said, “I don’t think that they will attack before spring. Derek told me that the military was maintaining around-the-clock surveillance using Predators. We continue to maintain a heightened state of alert and plan to resume the LRRP’s in late March.”

“We have several people we can contribute to that effort,” Bob offered.

“Oh?” Herb responded.

“Yes,” Bob continued, “People sometimes confuse us with the Quakers. Some of our members were Rangers, and one was in the Special Forces. We can add two 4-man units to the LRRP effort.”

“Great,” Herb said. “Can you put those men in touch with Randy and me?”

“Sure,” Bob replied, “They’ll get with you tomorrow.”

The topic turned to the subject of Holidays.

“Assuming that the President accepts the recommendations of the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention,” Gary remarked, “Our holidays will consist of: New Years, Easter, Independence Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas.”

“Of course,” Jacob added, “Religious observances such as Good Friday, Passover will still be observed by religious groups. We felt that some holidays like Labor Day, Veteran’s Day, Columbus Day, President’s Day and Martin Luther King’s Birthday reflected parts of our past that we could remember in our hearts and minds rather than as official observances. Besides, our reborn country will no doubt experience events in the future that will give rise to new holidays.”

“There is apparently a new settlement down in Trinidad,” Herb reported, “Derek says that the military has assigned a couple of people to liaise with them.”

“Oh?” Ron remarked, “Maybe we should send a delegation down to meet with them during the spring.”

The men agreed that Ron’s suggestion had merit; they would revisit the issue at a later date.

“I understand that some of you fellas are wannabe cowboys,” Jacob laughed, “Some of the folks over at our compound are calling you ‘The Three Old Geezers’.”

Ron groaned and rubbed his back; Gary inwardly smiled that he had survived his second brush with death at the hands of a horse named Salina.

“Personally,” Clarence announced, pulling himself erect and puffing out his chest, “I’d prefer that we were known as the ‘Tenth Calvary’.”

Friday, November 23rd, Ark I, security office, 9:30 am...

“Herb, Randy,” Bob began, “Let me introduce Mel James, US Army Special Forces, Devon Richards, US Army Rangers, Bill Harris, also a Ranger, Pat Lucky, Marine Corp sniper, and Matt Jones, US Army sniper; I was in the Corps, Force Recon.”

“Nice to meet you fellas,” Herb responded, “Randy and I welcome the help. We’ll discuss several things today; at the moment, how are you equipped for weapons?”

The two snipers had their own sniper rifles, one the M21 Tactical Rifle, and the other, the M25 White Feather™ Tactical/Carlos Hathcock model M1A rifle. Both men had Mil dot, top of the line, Springfield Armory scopes, third generation night scopes and silencers. The other men were equipped with selective fire M-16’s; all eight men had either an M-1911 or Beretta M-92 handgun.

“I’ll ask Derek to request new M-16’s for you fellas, fitted with the Surefire suppressors,” Randy offered.

“Bob,” Herb suggested, “How about you and Mel lead the patrols?”

Both men nodded in acceptance.

“We’ll run a couple of practice sessions, just to review and, perhaps eliminate any bad habits you’ve picked up,” Herb continued.

The men visited for several hours, sharing experiences, discussing tactics and just plain getting to know each other better. Herb excused himself briefly and found Derek in his MCC office. He explained that they needed 6 new M-16’s fitted with the M4FA suppressors for their two new LRRP units. Derek said he’d get right on it. Herb rejoined the men and they ended up spending the whole day together.

Saturday, November 24th, MCC, 0930 hours...

Sergeant Major Higgs stood before Major Olsen. He handed the young Major a copy of his orders and said, "Sergeant Major Higgs reporting for duty, Sir."

Derek looked at the papers in shock. It seemed that the Sergeant Major was being permanently reassigned to *The Ark* as his second-in command.

"At ease Sgt. Major," Derek said, "Pull up a chair. And, what's this all about?" he said waving the orders.

"Major, when I picked up the weapons," Higgs began, "I asked Brigadier Jamison and General Robinson to permanently reassign me to your office; I have to stay away from all the brass, pardon the expression sir, they give me Hay Fever. I hope you don't mind, Major."

"Mind?" Derek responded, "I've been trying to figure out how to get you permanently reassigned here ever since the 4th of July! Welcome aboard, Sgt. Major!"

Christmas season came and passed. Higgs and Derek were developing a real bond. The tough old veteran still had to leave the MCC to smoke his cigars, but it was a minor sacrifice. Mostly, he contented himself by chewing on the cigars, not lighting them. The LRRP recruits had completed the 'training reviews' and were ready to go.

Meanwhile in Trinidad, CO...

There was something about these people that made Captain Turner uneasy; he couldn't put his finger on it. Maybe it was the fact that the married couples didn't really act like married couples he knew. Maybe it was the high proportion of single men. Whatever it was, he knew that it was staring him right in the face and he just didn't recognize it for what it was. The people were friendly, but very reserved, not disposed to discussing their backgrounds. It was as if they were intentionally keeping him at a distance.

The only single woman among the group had come on to him, but he'd flashed his wedding ring and she'd gotten the hint. Anyway, he didn't particularly find her attractive despite her natural good looks; a woman with tattoos wasn't his cup of tea.

"Tattoos," he suddenly thought, "That's it; that's what's been bothering me. So many of these people have crude tattoos. "Crap, those are jailhouse tattoos."

Feeling that he didn't dare risk being overheard making a radio call, Captain Turner advised the group leader that he and his Sergeant had to report to Ft. Carson. It was time for their fitness reports. They would, he assured the leader, be back in 'a couple of days'. To maintain the illusion, he and the Sergeant left all of their belongings in Trinidad when they departed. They drove straight through to Ft. Carson.

Captain Turner explained his suspicions to Brigadier Jamison who immediately took the Captain to General Robinson's office. There, Captain Turner repeated the information for the General's benefit.

"How sure are you of all this, Captain?" General Robinson asked.

"Sir, I've given you the facts and my conclusions," Turner replied, "At the very least, Sir, we should keep an eye on them. And, Sir, I'd rather not return to Trinidad, if that's ok with you."

"Alright Captain," General Robinson, responded, "If you're right, it wouldn't do to have you in the thick of it. Brigadier, give those folks down in Trinidad a call. Tell them that Captain Turner and the Sergeant are being reassigned. Also tell them that as soon as another officer and Sergeant are available, they'll be sent down there. Tell them that since peace seems to have broken out, it may be a while."

"Yes sir," Brigadier Jamison responded and taking the Captain in tow, left to make the radio call.

After he'd made the call to Trinidad, Brigadier Jamison sent a runner to *The Ark* to relay the information. Upon getting the update, Higgs passed it on to Herb and Herb put *The Ark* on Yellow Alert. He visited with Randy, Bob and Mel and they decided to send all four LRRP units down to Trinidad to maintain a watch on the group.

Meanwhile, in Trinidad...

"I don't like it!" the leader said, "Not one damn bit. That Captain was acting pretty hinky when he told me he had to go to Ft. Carson for some idiot reason. We'd better get our recon guys out and check up on *The Ark*; see how they're acting. And, everybody get their guns and keep them close. I don't like this at all."

Meanwhile, at Ft. Carson...

Robinson, Jamison and the staff G-2 weenie studied the map depicting the missing settlements. Jamison removed the outlying pins from the map and the missing settlements suddenly formed a cluster center near Oklahoma City.

"We have a Missing Group listed for Oklahoma City," Jamison pointed out looking at the list.

"When did that Trinidad group appear?" Robinson asked.

"Around the same time, give or take," Jamison responded, "We can't really be sure. You remember the Blizzard, General? Right about that time, we began picking up signs of life in Trinidad."

“John (Brigadier Jamison), reassign a couple of those Predator’s to maintain a watch on Trinidad,” General Robinson directed, “And get Major Olsen on the horn, I want to talk to him.”

“Major, this is General Robinson,” Robinson spoke into the microphone, “What’s your status down there?”

“Sir, the compounds are on Yellow Alert and the residents have sent all 4 LRRP teams to scout Trinidad.”

“Four?” Robinson exclaimed, “I thought you folks only had 2 LRRP teams.”

“It’s in my last report, Sir,” Derek responded.

“I must have missed it Major,” Robinson replied absently, “Since you have 4 LRRP’s out, all in Trinidad, I won’t send any more down that way. Advise your people that if they run into any LRRP’s, they won’t be ours.”

“Yes Sir,” Derek replied.

“We have two Predators watching Trinidad, Son,” Robinson said, “I’ll pass along any intelligence we pick up. Robinson out.”

The Ark’s LRRP’s arrived in place north of Trinidad before the Trinidad LRRP’s had departed. When they arrived, they checked in by radio and received the information that Derek had forwarded from General Robinson. They fanned out on either side of I-25 on the south bank of Powell Arroyo. They had barely gotten settled when a Hummer carrying 4 persons, all garbed in winter cammo, came northbound out of Trinidad on I-25.

Without hesitation, eight silenced rifles fired into the vehicle causing it to veer off the road and crash. Luckily, the vehicle didn’t catch fire. They made their way to the vehicle and dispatched one survivor. Their inspection of the vehicle and its contents confirmed without a doubt that the four were convicts. They found a map case with *The Ark* circled in red marker.

Herb fired up the radio and reported the information to *The Ark*, asking that it be forwarded to General Robinson. He gave their exact coordinates from his GPS receiver. When he received the information from *The Ark*, General Robinson immediately scrambled 24 F-15E’s and 18 F-22’s from Denver. Loaded with two 1,000-pound JDAM’s, the Raptors had less capacity than the Strike Eagles

The Strike Eagles, which could carry the heaviest bomb load, had MER’s attached to the internal hard points. Each MER carried one CBU-52B, one CBU- 58B, and two CBU-71B dispensers, the only difference being the contents of the Cluster Bomb Unit containers. The Raptors made their run first, opening up the hard targets. The Strike

Eagles followed, dropping the CBU's, taking out the soft targets and the exposed hard targets.

Not all of the marauders were killed by the bomb runs; *The Ark's* LRRP's observed several cons running from the city. They killed those they could and began to track the remaining survivors.

Chapter Fifty-five – Part I Epilog

The LRRP's divided into teams of two and began to cut sign for the escaping cons. They methodically tracked down and terminated each person or group of people who had avoided the conflagration wrought by the Air Force bombers. Most of the cons had run for their lives; only a few had the presence of mind to grab a weapon and supplies. It didn't matter. With steely, cold detachment, the LRRP's cleaned up the filth. When finally they ran out of targets, they returned to Trinidad and hooked up with the military, which was cleaning up after the bombing attack.

"Brigadier Jamison?" Herb asked, "Are you in charge here?"

"Hi Herb, please call me John. Yes, I am in charge here," John answered, "How did you fellas make out?"

"We think that we got them all," Randy suggested.

"How many was that?" John inquired.

"Uh...137, if I have the numbers right," Herb replied. "Why do you ask?"

"With the 891 bodies and identifiable body parts we recovered," John said, "That would put the total body count at 1,028."

Herb let out a low whistle. He didn't like the implications of what might have happened.

"John, why didn't you use napalm in your attack?" Herb inquired.

"We would have if we'd caught them in the open," John replied, "Since we were bombing a city, we limited the incendiary munitions; less to rebuild. We brought your vehicles in and refueled them. They're in the parking lot across the street. If there's nothing further, gentlemen, I'm afraid that I've much to do."

They found their vehicles, climbed aboard and returned to *The Ark*. Weary from two weeks of hunting, the men had a hot shower and retired to catch up on lost sleep. When finally they woke, they returned to their regular jobs, confident that *The Ark* was safe for the time being.

April 2nd, 2008, The Ark I, security office...

The 'Tenth Calvary' was gathered for their usual morning bull session.

"Ronald," Clarence announced, "You'll be pleased to know that Chris has finished our 'mounts'. He specially outfitted 3 ATV's and 3 snowmobiles for us. You two fellas better get under the tanning lamps, you're a little light skinned for the Tenth."

“Just as long as we don’t have to ride those horses,” Gary allowed, “That’s fine with me.”

“I’m with you partner,” Ron added. “There’s not enough snow left for snowmobiles and it’s too muddy for the ATV’s; I guess the ‘Tenth’ will have to wait a couple of months to ride again.”

The Ark, an idea turned to reality, had served its purpose. It had allowed a group of ‘wackos’ from California to survive the worst disaster in the history of the US. Although the story was far from over, life had returned to a new normalcy. Morality was reestablished, crime virtually non-existent, elections would soon be held to elect a new responsible and responsive political structure.

The Ark Part II – Reconstruction

Chapter Fifty-six – The Ambush

June 1, 2008...

The ‘Three Old Geezers’ aka the ‘Tenth Calvary’ placed their camping and fishing gear aboard the trailers attached to their ATV’s. Rifles in scabbards, hog legs on their hips, they set out on a fishing trip. Not a trip to gather food for *The Ark*, not a LRRP, a genuine vacation. Older, wiser, and truly tired, they had earned a vacation at last.

Ron took the lead, Gary followed and Clarence brought up the rear. There were numerous creeks crisscrossing the National Forest. Arriving at a likely spot, the men set up camp, unlimbered their fly-casting equipment and tried their luck. In practically no time, they had caught enough trout for dinner. Gary set 3 bottles of home brew in the ice-cold creek to chill while Ron and Clarence cleaned the fish. The smaller fish were simply gutted, but the larger Rainbow was filleted, given Gary’s aversion to eating a fish that looked like a fish.

They built a fire, prepared and ate dinner and sat around visiting long after the sun had set. Eventually, the conversation waning and fatigue setting in, the men turned in for the night. They slept soundly through the night, Clarence awakening just after dawn. Ron crawled out of his tent around 8am, but Gary didn’t put in an appearance until after 9:30am. Meanwhile, Clarence had picked up deadfall and had quite a pile of firewood. Ron had prepared a light breakfast for Clarence and himself and they had eaten and washed dishes.

“Morning fellas,” Gary announced, “What’s for breakfast?”

“Breakfast?” Ron countered, “Do you mean lunch?” He tossed Gary a MRE, and said, “Civilized folks have been up, eaten, gathered firewood and are ready to go fishing.”

Gary struggled through the MRE, wondering how our military managed to survive on the things for days and weeks on end. Just as he was ready to join the two fishermen, they returned with stringers full of trout.

“We have enough for lunch and dinner,” Ron cheerfully announced.

Gary set up the business radio and called *The Ark* to check in.

“How’s the fishing?” Herb asked.

“Oh, ok, I guess,” Gary responded, “I’ll check in the same time tomorrow, out.”

They had trout and pan bread for lunch and Ron prepared fried potatoes, trout and pan bread for dinner. During the afternoon, they walked around looking for another creek.

Finding none within walking distance, they decided to break camp the next day and scout around for another creek on their ATV's. The evening was a repeat of the night before and the men settled in for another good night's sleep.

Just after midnight, Gary was awakened by what he thought was an unnatural sound from the woods. He strained to hear more sounds, but hearing nothing, he dropped back off to sleep. All three men awakened just after dawn. They had breakfast and began to break camp.

Just after 8am, a shot rang out, hitting Ron in the right shoulder and knocking him down. The other two dropped to the ground, drew their Colts and searched for the source of the gunshot. Gary belly crawled over to Ron.

"Holy hell that hurts!" Ron complained.

Gary examined the wound and found it to be through and through without hitting a bone or major artery. He fished a couple of bandages from his fanny pack and set about bandaging his friend, keeping low to avoid being fired upon.

"You in the camp," a voice called out, "Put down those guns, stand up and put your hands up."

"Not frigging likely," Gary thought. The radio lay within his grasp as Ron had been carrying it to the ATV's to load it. Gary flipped on the switch, grabbed the mike and said, "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday. We're taking fire at same location, send help."

Herb took the radio call and within 5 minutes had 2 LRRP teams moving out to the location on ATV's.

Meanwhile, Clarence thought he had spotted the attacker. Moving laterally slowly, he slowly circled the spot where he thought the shooter was, eventually drawing up behind the man unnoticed. Dressed in tattered prison garb, the man presented a clear target.

"Last chance!" the man shouted. "Surrender now or I'll kill the bunch of you."

Clarence took careful aim with the Winchester 94 and put a .45 Colt round in the back of the attacker's head, killing him instantly. He rose, walked over to the man and picked up the semi-automatic M-16.

"You won't be needing this anymore, scumbag," he announced, and ran to join Ron and Gary.

The LRRP teams arrived just as Clarence reached Ron and Gary. Fred was with the LRRP's and he checked Ron's wound.

"Ron, you're a lucky SOB," Fred announced, "The round went straight through and

didn't appear to hit any bone or major artery."

"That's what I thought," Gary responded, "I guess we best return to *The Ark*; these woods still have animals besides raccoon, deer and bear."

June 3, 2008, The Ark...

They returned with the vacationers just before noon. Fred took Ron to the hospital and cleaned and re-dressed his wound, announcing that he was keeping him overnight for observation. Herb, Randy, Bob and Mel held a quick meeting and decided that they had better get their teams together and scour the adjacent National Forest for any more cons and would be killers. They set out just before dark, carrying enough supplies for a month.

Gary and Clarence sat in the security office recounting the close call for anyone who was interested. Don joined them in the security office.

"I was giving consideration," Don said, "To moving the deputies and their families back to Pueblo. I think that I'll reconsider and postpone that to a later date. However, we have resumed 2-man patrols around the county and it turns out there was a group out at the lake near Pueblo West. They were in deep hiding, avoiding the military and everyone. It was just a fluke that one of my deputies spotted them."

"Do tell," Clarence responded, "What's going to happen to them now?"

"I think that we should consider inviting them down to *The Ark*," Don offered. "Before we do that, however, I think that we should make a trip up to Pueblo West and get to know them a little better. I took the liberty of dispatching a pickup truck of food supplies to them; we can spare the food and they really need it."

The men talked about what they might do, depending upon the circumstances. They agreed to wait until Ron was out of the hospital and discuss it with him. There was no sense, they agreed, of rushing into anything.

June 4, 2008, security office...

Clarence was enjoying his morning coffee and reading an old copy of *Outdoor Life* when Ron entered the security office. His right arm in a sling, Ron looked none the worse for the wear, all things being considered.

"I think that I've had enough fishing to last me for a while, partner," Ron conceded.

"Ron!" Clarence responded cheerfully, "You're looking good."

"I sure wish that I felt as good as I look," Ron grumbled, "It's not the first time in my life that I've been shot, but I don't remember it hurting this much!"

Throughout the day, well-wishers stopped by to look in on Ron. Eventually, he tired of the attention and returned to his home. Clarence had filled Ron in on the deputies' discovery, but Ron had little interest in discussing the matter.

July 4th, 2008, *The Ark...*

The annual 4th of July picnic was well underway, with the usual surplus of food, troops in attendance, and baseball games underway. General Robinson and Brigadier Jamison were visiting with Jacob, Bob, Ron, Gary, Clarence, Fred and Chris.

"And so, I'll be leaving for the new capital in Philadelphia next week," Milt continued. "I'm getting my fourth star and John will be taking my place in command of Ft. Carson. From now on fellas, it will be Major General Jamison."

Congratulations were offered to both men. Advancement seemed to come more quickly since the bombing in the old Capital, Washington, DC.

"The assembly has decided to district the state based on a county system, for the moment," Jacob said when the congratulations had died down. "Once we can complete a census, we will re-district based on population. There will still be 64 members of the Assembly, but they will each represent an equal share of the state's population."

"According to the new Colorado Constitution, there will be a single house in the Assembly," he continued. "I expect it will be the same for most states. According to the revised Federal Constitution, each state will have a single Senator and a minimum of two Representatives. The Congress will be much reduced in size."

"Terms have been changed to 4 years for both Representatives and Senators, and they will be elected on alternating 2-year cycles with the Senators being elected on years divisible by four and the Representatives on the in-between 2-year cycle. Senators and Representatives have been limited to two 4-year terms. There will be no more dynasties in Congress."

"Local government," Jacob said, "Will be a matter of Town-Hall Meetings; it's past time that the people had a say in their government. Welfare programs are a thing of the past. People will have to work to eat. I expect that each state and the federal government will adopt a program like the old CCC. There are a lot of roads to maintain and so forth."

"Train service is being reestablished similar to what it was in its heyday. For the moment, the only aircraft flying will be military aircraft. Until we can get the petroleum industry up and running, we have a shortage of fuel. I would expect that there would be an emphasis on alternative sources of energy."

The baseball games had ended, the meat was ready to eat and the men left to join their families. While everyone enjoyed the holiday, the LRRP's continued to clean up the

woods. They had accounted for about a half dozen additional cons-turned-woodsman during their patrols. Another week should see the end of their cleansing of the National Forest and areas to the west, north and south. After that, they intended to return to The Ark, rest up and spread out to the farming country to the northeast, east and southeast. There would be no more shooting on their watch, if they could help it.

Around the country, electrical power was fully restored. Factories were starting back up, albeit on a smaller scale due to a shortage of labor. In the final analysis, that would be ok because there were a lot fewer consumers. Items that depended upon imported resources could not be manufactured, as had previously been the case because there was no foreign trade. The military continued to clean up the cities, identifying bodies and consigning the remains to mass graves. Orphans, when located, were adopted by one settlement or another, usually in the area where the orphan was found.

Crime was surely and swiftly dealt with on the local level. Typically, persons convicted of a violent crime were hung the next day. Minor crimes frequently resulted in the individual being horse whipped. The remedies were crude, but effective. Why lock someone up and have to feed and support him or her?

On the state and local levels, at least, justice was sure and swift. There were few federal crimes. Treason and violations of the 1st and 2nd amendment provisions, now a part of the Constitution, were the only federal crimes. Civil rights had ceased to be an issue, for all persons were now equal. Period. Mental illness, for the most part, became a thing of the past, too. Everyone worked and their friends and co-workers dealt with and helped them with any problems they had. The US had become a community again.

Since the military had the borders tightly closed and there were few jobs available to outsiders, the term illegal alien had lost its meaning. Anyone who crossed the southern border either joined with a community where they had family or found themselves worse off than before they crossed. Many, if they didn't starve to death, soon returned to their home country. Eventually, ships were crossing the seas, but the US was unwilling to accept immigrants. The US had become, for the first time in years, an exporter rather than an importer.

Having rested fully, the LRRP's set out to cover the area of Colorado to the east of The Ark. Several small prosperous communities were located and noted. Apparently, the communities had taken care of any criminals who had come their way and after a month of searching without finding a single con, the LRRP's returned to *The Ark*.

The military, for its part, reviewed the cases of all of the old cons that had been returned to prisons. All persons who had, in the time before the balloon went up, been convicted of violent crimes received a new sentence, administered by a squad of soldiers equipped with M-16's. The non-violent criminals were all re-sentenced to 10-year terms and given credit for time served. Anyone otherwise eligible for release was educated in the new laws of the US of A. They were then assigned to a CCC camp to earn their own way.

The Ark, Thanksgiving, 2008...

Ron was fully healed from his injuries. After the LRRP's had cleaned up the National Forest, the men had made several more fishing trips; however, they always took a group of well-armed teenagers with them as insurance. Ron and Clarence had both taken an Elk this year; Ron now knew the difference between a deer (short) and an Elk (tall). The dinner this year would consist of wild game taken by the residents. Pheasants, venison, elk, rabbit, and squirrel made up the menu.

The people at Pueblo West had been invited to join the residents of *The Ark*, but had declined, opting instead to reoccupy Pueblo. Don had reopened his Pueblo office, but the center of the Sheriff's operation remained at *The Ark*. Crops were diversified, and several varieties of wheat and beans were planned for the coming crop year.

After the dinner and the men had helped the women clear the tables, the women washed the dishes and gathered to visit. The men likewise gathered in their own corner and engaged in conversation. Comfortable with their own roles, the Ladies didn't feel in the least slighted by the men. Their husbands treated them with respect, sought their opinions, included them in all decision-making and were responsive to their needs.

"Well partner," Ron said looking at Gary, "How did you like the wild game meal?"

"Give me a good beef steak or a piece of chicken anytime," Gary laughed, "You can have your wild game."

"That goes for me, too Ron." Clarence replied, "It was a lot of fun hunting the Elk, but, I'd rather have a pork chop or a piece of chicken."

"Salina had a colt," Ron commented, "Gary, are you going to break it to saddle when it gets of age?"

"Uh huh," Gary responded, "Right after the second Tuesday of next week..."

Chapter Fifty-seven – Invasion

The old ocean liner was filled with oil and surviving Muslims from several countries, assembled in Cairo, boarded. The passengers included Libyans, Egyptians, Saudis, Iranians, Iraqis, Pakistanis and Afghans. Old hatreds were forgotten; a new hatred burned in their souls. The Israelis, lackeys of the Americans had destroyed millions of their populations with their nuclear attacks. The Indians, British lackeys one and all, had tried to destroy Pakistan. The great epidemic, rumored to be American biowarfare, had killed millions more. The Mullahs urged the destruction of the Great Satan. Obviously the SARS epidemic had been started by Americans, hadn't they lost the least population of all?

The ship set sail for the gates of Gibraltar and beyond. Radio reports indicated that the US military had sealed the borders of the country. They would land in Tampico, Mexico and make their way to Ciudad Juarez. There, they would cross the border in the dead of night, killing any American soldiers, or anyone else for that matter, who dared to get in their way. The voyage was long and filled with tedium. The old liner, long since past its heyday, could barely make 9 knots. So, they cleaned and re-cleaned their AK's, counted and re-counted the RPG's and caressed the SA-7's. Because their ammunition was limited to 4,000 rounds per soldier, they spent precious little time practicing their marksmanship.

May 1, 2009, Tampico, Mexico...

The ship finally arrived and the warriors of the Jihad disembarked. They marched to the northwest, arriving in Ciudad Juarez on the 4th of July. There, they overwhelmed a lighter than normal border guard around midnight, entered into Texas and later in the day crossed into New Mexico. They were careful, these warriors of the desert, hiding by day and moving only at night. These 2,000 plus mujahedeen, holy warriors, planned to disburse throughout the US and attack not the people, but the infrastructure. They would destroy dams, the restored electrical grids, factories and any target of opportunity that was necessary to any large group of people.

July 5th, US border with Ciudad Juarez...

The alarm had begun to spread around 0200 when replacement sentries reported to relieve the soldiers patrolling the border. Evidence indicated that a large party of men, perhaps numbering a couple of thousand had slit the sentries' throats and quietly entered the US. There was little evidence of where the men had gone from that point. The best guess was that they had moved north out of El Paso on I-25. The area was flooded with infrared equipped Predators, but no trace of the invaders could be found.

July 5th, The Ark, MCC, 0900...

Major Olsen was handed a message taken by Walker before he had turned in. Higgs and Derek were frankly shocked at the news, an invasion of the US after all of these

years? Unbelievable! Higgs got on the radio to Ft. Carson and verified the message. He relayed what he learned to Derek.

“Major,” Higgs said, “It would appear that a force of as many as 2,000 men crossed the border at El Paso and headed north on I-25. So far, our forces have been unable to locate the invaders.”

“Do they have any idea who it might be?” Derek asked.

“No sir,” Higgs replied, “Not at this time. They are extending the search radius, backtracking trying to find how they got to North America. Once they do that, they may be able to identify who these people are. For all practical purposes, the entire country is on Red Alert. But, until we can backtrack them or locate them, everything is up for grabs.”

“You had better pass this on to Herb, Sgt. Major,” Derek said.

“They already have the news and *The Ark* is on Yellow Alert, sir,” Higgs reported.

Had the military looked at the Gila National Forest, they might have spotted the men in the rugged country. The teams were supplied with either a suitcase nuke or Semtex explosives and weapons and sent forth on their missions, one or two teams leaving at a time.

Libya had supplied its remaining supply of suitcase sized a-bombs, acquired many years earlier from a profiteering Russian General. Their instructions were to secure transportation and proceed to their targets. The targets were widespread and would take time to reach. A few days after the primary team left, a second team, armed with Semtex was dispatched for the same targets.

The overall plan was to arrive at their targets early. The supporting team members would arrive separately. They were to remain in position and attack on the Monday September 1st, the old Labor Day holiday. They did not have enough nuclear weapons or explosives to destroy all of the dams and nuclear power plants; there were over 2,300 hydroelectric dams and 104 nuclear power plants in the US. It was a risky plan. To succeed, the events had to occur at the same time, 0900 on September 1st, 2009. Otherwise, the alarm would be raised and the targets wrapped in a security blanket that the teams could not penetrate.

The military was on high alert. Dams, power plants, bridges and factory areas were being protected. The troops were spread thin, far too thin. The terrorists stole vehicles as unobtrusively as possible and went on their way. Consequently, they were able to arrive at their destinations early. The nuclear power plants, although the most heavily guarded facilities, represented the greatest damage potential, generating contamination widely around the country. They had 104 targets and about 200 holy warriors available to attack each target.

All of the men had forged identification papers. They were disguised as farm workers and frequently traveled in vans, small trucks and similar vehicles. Their luck held and they eventually reached their targets late in August. They had the forces guarding the 104 nuclear plants outnumbered and at 0900 on September 1, 2009, 104 nuclear power plants were destroyed or totally incapacitated. The leakage from the plants was widespread making the nuclear accidents at Chernobyl, Tree Mile Island, Tokaimura, Chel-yabinsk, and others pale by comparison.

When the explosions took place, the military rapidly disseminated the information to all of the settlements around the US, including *The Ark*. *The Ark's* backup system kicked in and the wind turbines and backup generator at *The Ark 1* kept *The Ark 2* up and running. However, the north and south farms at *The Ark 1* lost their power. The dairy herds which had grown considerably, were still milked by machines, courtesy of the US Army who made trailer mounted diesel generators available to most of the settlements.

The terrorists obviously lacked any current intelligence. Otherwise, they would have known that bringing down the power grids was a wasted effort. With the power demands sharply curtailed, there were ample reserves of generating capacity. It was a matter of bringing some of the fossil fuel powered plants on line, making minor repairs to the grid and power would be restored. And, much of America no longer lived in the cities. Thus rather than killing 75 million Americans, as would have been the case prior to the tragedy in Washington and the ensuing changes to America, there were fewer than 1 million American injured and most of them were expected to survive.

The Muslim force numbering about 200 had sped south on I-25 from the Denver area. They were just south of Colorado Springs when the bomb went off. They had managed to avoid most contact with the American military and had blown through any they encountered. They were headed for Pueblo where they would lay up and wait for additional groups to join them. From there, they would proceed to the famous Hoover Dam and bring it down.

Meanwhile at The Ark...

Both compounds were on Red Alert. An observer in the tower had spotted the telltale mushroom cloud as it rose above Boulder. Don sent four more deputies to Pueblo, doubling his force there. Herb, Randy, Bob and Mel were gathered in the security office.

“So, that’s it fellas,” Herb concluded, “Our four teams will cover our northern flank and hold in place; if whoever did this comes south, we’ll be ready.”

The men got into their pickups and moved north. When they were about 5 miles north of *The Ark*, they fanned out, forming an early warning system. Lloyd had the sailplane aloof and floated over their positions, covering them from the air.

“We’ve backed tracked those terrorist to Tampico sir,” a G-2 officer reported to General Jamison. “It appears that the terrorists are from the Middle East. Based on the capacity

of the old liner, we estimate that there are about 2,000 of them. Given the widespread attacks, I'd say that we have a repeat of the convict situation, except that these people are better armed and better prepared."

"Could be Captain," John replied, "It makes no sense that they would go after our power grid. Anyway, the minute that the Predators get a hit, we'll corral the group that hit Boulder."

In the skies above southern Colorado, a lone Predator made a pass over the city of Pueblo. The number of infrared returns far exceeded the number expected for the city. In due course, the information made its way up the chain of command to General Jamison.

"Get Major Olsen on the radio and inform him that they have intruders in Pueblo," Jamison ordered.

Derek received the radio call and *The Ark* immediately loaded their Militia aboard trucks and headed toward Pueblo. They picked up the LRRP's on the way and fanned out, surrounding Pueblo. They were soon joined by the military and Jamison took command of the situation.

"Sheriff?" John asked, "What's the status of your people?"

"One locked himself in the armory at the Sheriff's station," Don replied, "The others were out on patrol and when the Arabs hit town, they went to ground. They're hiding in residences around town. I'm in radio contact with them, and they are in no immediate danger."

"Good," General Jamison responded. "The way I see this is that the military will initiate contact with the terrorists; we have more training in urban warfare." You people from *The Ark* will back us up and hold the ground we take."

The Army began their campaign of urban warfare, clearing one building at a time. They met with stiff resistance and took significant casualties. It took them nearly 2 days before Pueblo was declared to be secure. A few wounded terrorists were captured and after undergoing medical treatment, were subjected to relentless questioning by a less than compassionate military. In the days before the Washington attack, one might have described what was going on as torture.

Eventually, the military learned all there was to know from the surviving terrorists and they were sent to Paradise. In this new, bolder world, problems were disposed of quickly. The military returned to Ft. Carson and the Militia returned to *The Ark*. The LRRP's were invited to join the General at Ft. Carson.

In General Jamison's office, September 4, 2009, 16:00 hours...

Herb, Randy, Bob and Mel were in General Jamison's office with the General.

"Gentlemen," John said, "What I am about to propose to you is highly unorthodox. And, it is, I might add, strictly voluntary. It seems that the terrorists intend to strike Hoover Dam next. We can provide people to protect the dam, but we're simply spread too thin to hunt down the remaining terrorists. I propose that our LRRP's join with your LRRP's and the combined force will hunt down and eradicate the terrorists. I can supply you with anything you need."

"General," Herb responded, "We have an ongoing training program and about half of our Militia is up to LRRP standards. I'd like to suggest that we outfit these people with the extra equipment they need and have them join us."

"What do you need?" John asked.

"If you could supply additional suppressors," Herb said, "I think that we would be up to speed."

"Did you people ever see what the Sergeant Major brought in that truck of goods way back when?" John asked.

"No sir," Randy laughed, "You'd think that the SM was hoarding gold."

"Actually, fellas," John replied, "The SM was hoarding the remaining supply of LAWS rockets that we had here at Ft. Carson. I know that they have been replaced by the AT-4, but they're smaller and easier for a man on foot to carry. I'll have the SM share with you."

And thus began the hunt for the remaining 1,000 or so terrorists; a highly unorthodox joint affair of the military and civilians. A force of about 150 highly skilled men and women, equipped with suppressed M-16's, the occasional sniper rifle including a few Barrett M-82A1s and TAC-50 .50 caliber rifles, LAWS rockets and a desire to protect the new United States at all costs, set out to track down and eliminate the terrorists.

Chapter Fifty-eight – A Hunting We Will Go

Lt. Colonel Derek Olsen would be in overall military command of the operation, assisted by Sergeant Major Higgs. Through the good graces of the military, the civilians from *The Ark* were all sworn in as Deputy US Marshals. Somewhere, somehow, General Jamison even came up with a box of badges and before they departed, each civilian was issued official identification and sworn in. The military had provided few people and the operation would be primarily a civilian affair. All of the military people were trained snipers and most were NCO's.

The column departed from *The Ark* on September 10th, heading south on I-25 to Albuquerque where they picked up I-40 west bound. They continued west through New Mexico and Arizona and picked up US 93 for Boulder City. They continued on US 93 to a spot about 10 miles from Hoover Dam and parked and camouflaged their vehicles. They then proceeded on foot to the area of the dam.

Many of them had never seen Hoover Dam before and were shocked at its size. They contacted the military guarding the facility and about half of their number repelled down the face of the dam and set up positions on either side of the river. Half of the remaining forces were sent to the other side of the dam. They dispersed and set about digging in to intercept the terrorists. They didn't have long to wait.

"I have activity at 12 o'clock," a voice reported over a handi talkie.

Soon, several positions on the west bank reported activity. The group of 200 terrorists had apparently parked their vehicles some distance away; they were now moving to occupy the same ground occupied by the LRRP forces.

"Mark your targets and fire at will," came the command.

The suppressed .50s spoke first, followed by the .30 caliber rifles. The terrorists launched RPG's in the direction of the dug in troops, failing to score a single direct hit. The US forces responded with a volley of LAWS rockets, inflicting severe damage on the terrorists. When the terrorists stopped firing and withdrew, the LRRP's went into action, stalking the terrorists. Over the course of the next day, they located and disposed of each of the remaining terrorists.

At Higgs suggestion, about two thirds of the troops at the base of the dam were moved back to the top and dispersed to the two sides. The LRRP's refined their positions based on their first experience and the addition of personnel and hunkered down to wait for the next group of terrorists. They had barely removed the evidence of the battle when a second group of terrorists appeared. This group was far more cautious. Perhaps they had been in radio contact with the first group and when they saw no sign of the first group became wary. They stopped and camped out of range of all but the .50 caliber rifles.

Leaving the snipers with the .50s in place, the LRRP's moved out and encircled the second group of terrorists. When they had moved within 200 yards of the group, they began sniping. The terrorists were themselves terrorized. They were receiving fire from nearly all sides from suppressed weapons and couldn't locate a single target to fire on. When their numbers had been dramatically reduced, the survivor's charged what they thought to be a weak point in the attackers' line.

The battle on the west bank had been over for less than two hours when *The Ark* resident's and military defending the east side of the dam began receiving fire from a third group of terrorists. Somehow, the terrorists, perhaps warned by the gunfire coming from their comrades on the west bank, had managed to spot a couple of the American positions. They shot and killed two of the military NCO's.

Waiting until dark, Herb and Randy and the LRRP's under their command, slipped out of their defensive positions and began to stalk the terrorists. The terrorists were spread out, and on guard for the slightest sound or movement. However, by morning, nearly 100 of the group had gone to Paradise. When they received no return fire from the American defenders, the terrorists rose to rush and secure the American positions. The Americans, having taken up the positions formerly occupied by the now dead terrorists, remained in place and on Herb's command, cut down the terrorists from the rear.

Later that day, the military guarding the dam sent word that the threat was over. The men were to wrap it up and return to Ft. Carson. Two days later, having dropped off the 125 odd Militia members at *The Ark*, the military and *The Ark's* LRRP's reported in at Ft. Carson.

"General," Herb said, "There are a lot of things that just don't make sense."

"I'll tell you what I know Herb," General Jamison said, "Apparently the terrorists were divided into 10 groups of about two hundred men. Each of these groups was, in turn divided into groups of 20 or less. The attacks on the nuclear facilities were carried out by the small groups of 20 or so men with the exception of the attack on the Boulder reactor. Why they sent 200 men to Boulder, we may never know. Two of the reformed groups were caught in Ohio and wiped out by civilian Militia. The remaining 600 made it to Hoover Dam where you punched their clock."

"What's the fate of nuclear power in this country, General?" Herb asked.

"With all of the reactors taken out, nuclear power is a thing of the past," Jamison said. "It will take years to clean up the mess left by those terrorists. There are some remarkable advances being made to clean up fossil fuel generation, however, especially those plants that burn coal. I would imagine that over the next 2 or 3 decades, all power will be environmentally safe, either wind or solar generated. In the meantime, we are dependent on fossil fuels."

"I wish we had more wind turbines," Herb stated flatly, "We could avoid running our

generator except to test it monthly.”

“You may be in luck there Herb,” Jamison responded, “Are you fellas ready to take a trip to California?”

“What?” Herb responded.

“California, as in Palm Springs,” Jamison laughed, “You can send a crew out there and dismantle several of the idle wind turbines there and bring them back to *The Ark*. Call it a redistribution of natural resources.”

“We’ll get right on it General,” Herb replied.

October 1, 2009, outside of Palm Springs, California...

Herb had brought half of *The Ark’s* Militia with him. They located a crane and began the process of dismantling the wind turbines. They dismantled and loaded 8 50kw turbines and all the spare parts they could find.

It would be too late in the year to install the turbines at *The Ark* when they returned. Come spring, however, they would install 6 turbines at *The Ark 2* and two on the north farm. When they had finished their task, they headed east and ran smack dab into a blizzard in the Santa Rosa, New Mexico area. They had to wait a week for the blizzard to pass. They mounted chains on their semis and continued eastward, arriving back at *The Ark* near the end of October.

Sunday, October 26, 2009, The Ark...

The equipment was covered with tarps and left on the semis. After cleaning up and eating dinner, everyone attended the now monthly meeting at *The Ark 1*.

“Herb tells me that we have an additional 400kw of wind turbine capacity,” Ron started, “I’d like to give him and his crew a hearty round of applause for their work.”

When the applause died down, Derek was asked to make a report on the military situation around the country.

“General Jamison advises that our troops are being pulled from the Canadian border,” Derek began, “Some will be reassigned to our border with Mexico and the others will return to their military bases. All of the airborne assets are also being reassigned to the Mexican border, too.”

“Are they expecting more trouble from that area?” Ron inquired.

“No, they are not,” Derek quickly responded, “But an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

“What is the situation around the world?” Ron asked.

“In Europe, Germany seems to be making the fastest recovery, perhaps because they have the most practice at recovering,” Derek responded. “France is still in dire straits, they can’t seem to get their people to work at rebuilding their country. Other countries are pretty much as you might expect, behind Germany, but far ahead of France. Great Britain has undergone somewhat of a change, with the demise of the monarchy. There was some fierce resistance from the IRA, but that has settled down. In summary, each of the smaller countries like Ireland, Scotland, etc. is now its own country.”

“The old Soviet Union has undergone the most change. The communist party is no more. The survivors revolted, again, and have formed a rather democratic form of government,” Derek continued. “We are getting no information out of the far east. We can’t even speculate what is going on in China.”

The folks discussed various other topics and the meeting was over. Ron, Clarence and Gary retired to the security office.

“What say we make a run up to Ft. Carson tomorrow?” Ron asked.

“What for Ron?” Clarence replied with his own question.

“Well, we’ve collected all of the US Marshal IDs and badges and have to return them to General Jamison,” Ron replied, “I still think we should have a few US Marshals, though and I was thinking that we should volunteer.”

“Herb, Randy, Bob and Mel are still US Marshals,” Gary countered.

“I know Chester,” Ron said speaking to Gary and winking at Clarence, “But I’d feel better if you and Festus,” nodding at Clarence and winking at Gary, “And I were sworn in.”

“Yes sir, Marshal Dillon,” Gary and Clarence laughed.

Early the next morning, the ‘Tenth Calvary’ set off for Ft. Carson. They turned in the federal ID’s and badges and after much persuasion, convinced General Jamison to appoint them as US Marshals. They were printed and photographed and sworn in and issued their badges. On the way back to *The Ark*, Gary asked, “Who are we going to get to be Miss Kitty?”

When the men arrived back at *The Ark*, their wives presented them with vests to wear their badges on. Clarence immediately began plans to erect the *Long Branch Saloon* come spring. Primarily a youth center, he planned to tuck a bar and tables in the back room for his two friends to live out their fantasy.

Thanksgiving Day, 2009, The Ark...

Through the good auspices of General Jamison the residents had a dozen turkeys to cook and eat. The other entrees included home cured ham, and standing rib roast. The cooks had carefully planned the meal and by the time it was over, nothing remained. Everyone took their dishes to the collection point and the 3 old friends adjourned to the security office.

“Now, that’s what I call a meal,” Gary announced.

“I sort of missed the Elk,” Clarence laughed.

“Yeah, just like Gary missed having a chance to ride Salina,” Ron retorted.

Ron reached into a desk drawer and withdrew 3 high quality cigars. “Here you go fellas, courtesy of Herb and the City of Palm Springs.”

They lit up the nasty smelling cigars and enjoyed themselves immensely. With these 3, it was a perpetual contest of Brinksmanship. They one-upped each other on a regular basis. Clarence had his plan for spring and Gary was thinking of what he could do at Christmas time to put him one up on his friends.

Friday, December 25, 2009...

“Here you go fellas,” Gary said, handing Ron and Clarence each a box, “Merry Christmas.”

The men opened their boxes to discover a Randall Model 12 "Bear Bowie" – 8" blade, 1⁵/₈" wide of ¼" stock. Top cutting edge sharpened. 5" (approximate) leather handle; Brass double hilt, with forward curve. From the looks in their eyes, Gary was top dog today. Gary owed General Jamison big time for this. He had no idea where the General had come up with 3 of the knives, but he gladly paid an ounce of gold for each of the knives.

The ground was thawed in late April when Clarence began the Youth Center. Using pole building construction techniques, he had the building erected, insulated and ready for occupancy by the time it came time to begin planting crops. An old jukebox was recovered from a honky-tonk bar in Pueblo and Ron refilled it with ‘real music’, his collection of 45-rpm records from the fifties and sixties.

A soda fountain was built, complete with grill and pizza oven. The young people worked hard and genuinely deserved a place of their own, away from the adults. The back room was only accessible from another outside door and Clarence had faithfully reproduced, or as near as his memory allowed, the *Long Branch Saloon* from *Gunsmoke*. Effective immediately, the new official headquarters for the US Marshals of the Tenth Calvary was the *Long Branch Saloon*.

Saturday, May 1, 2010...

Ron, Clarence and Gary sat in the *Long Branch* drinking their morning coffee and bs'ing each other. Herb walked in, got a cup of coffee and sat with them.

"Morning fellas," Herb said.

"Morning Herb," they chorused.

"You fellas feel like taking a trip down New Mexico way?" Herb asked.

"Why? What's up Herb?" Ron asked.

"Nothing much, hopefully," Herb replied. "I got word that they need a bunch of US Marshals down on the border and, well, you guys are US Marshals, even if you are a little long in the tooth."

"Why do they need Marshals, Herb?" Clarence asked.

"Do any of you guys know who Francisco 'Pancho' Villa was?" Herb replied.

"Pancho Villa?" they chorused.

Chapter Fifty-nine – Pancho Villa Rides Again

“It seems,” Herb continued, “That a group of Mexican bandits have been making forays across the border into the US; this in spite of the doubled military presence down there. If you remember your history, the US military was never able to capture Pancho Villa. The leader of this group, no one knows his name for sure, has taken to calling himself Pancho Villa. The military shifts its troops to meet each penetration and he simply penetrates somewhere else.”

“What has he been doing on this side of the border?” Gary asked.

“It’s almost humorous,” Herb replied, “They are holding up people traveling in the area. They haven’t hurt anyone unless they resisted, and they have killed no one. Anyway, the military wants a group of US Marshals to travel to the area, mount up and meet with this Villa fella. Interested?”

“Hell yes,” Clarence shouted, “Where’s my bugle?”

“Calm down Festus,” Ron kidded, “This is a job for the Gunsmoke crew, not the Tenth Calvary.”

“Do I really have to ride a horse?” Gary asked quietly.

Sunday, May 2, 2010, on the road to Las Cruces...

They had managed to locate several horse trailers and had them hitched behind the 3 pickups. One trailer held up to 4 horses, the other two held 2. Ron, Gary and Clarence brought up the rear, pulling a trailer with 3 horses.

“I am not looking forward to getting back on a horse,” Gary protested.

“Hell Gary,” Ron replied, “There’s nothing to it. It’s the next day that’s a problem.”

“I suppose we could try to find you a buggy,” Clarence offered.

“Oh never mind,” Gary groaned, “I’ll get through it.”

The party stopped in Las Cruces for the night. The next morning, they continued until they caught I-10 and headed west. Reaching Deming, they turned south on state road 11 and drove to Columbus. They got out of the trucks, tired the horses to posts and went to meet the military commander for the area.

They were shown to the office of Captain Ronald Hartman, the area commander.

“Well gentlemen,” Captain Hartman said, “You’re the US Marshals?”

“Yes sir,” Herb answered. “What can we do for you Captain?”

Captain Hartman spread out a map and briefed the men. He showed them the various points along the border that the Mexican Bandits had penetrated. It seemed that no matter what he did to respond to a penetration, the Bandits would find the chink in their armor and cross again.

He suspected that the Mexicans had a sympathizer on our side of the border that was keeping them informed by radio of the military’s movements. What he needed, was some civilians who wouldn’t attract attention. They could go to the most likely spot for the Mexicans to cross after he made an elaborate production of moving troops to the site of the last penetration.

The military put them up in a large tent and gave them mess hall privileges. Ron would have none of that; this was as close as he’d ever get to genuine Mexican food. They found a small Mexican restaurant and went inside as two separate parties. Ron, Clarence and Gary got a booth, ordered a Dos Equis and their food. A few minutes later, Herb and company entered, took a table and placed their orders. After dinner, they returned to their tent and tried to sleep.

Tuesday, May 4, 2010, Columbus, NM...

The military made a great show of moving their units to the west. The owner of the cantina, a cousin of the bandit leader, got on the radio and told his cousin that the Army had moved. He missed the seven men mounting their horses and riding south. The 4 LRRP’s were armed with M-16’s except for Herb, who had his Sniper rifle. They walked the horses to a spot near the border and set up camp. Towards evening, Herb found a likely vantage point and set up his sniping position.

When nothing happened, they turned in, leaving Herb on guard. Randy spelled him and Bob spelled Randy. Just before dawn, Bob shook their shoulders and Herb returned to his sniping position. A group of perhaps 30 Mexicans approached on horseback. The Americans sat holding cold cups of coffee with their rifles across their laps. The horsemen appeared to be armed mostly with 9mm or .45 model 1911 pistols. Clarence slowly rose and approached the leader.

“You can call me Festus,” he said, “We’re US Marshals, can we help you gentlemen?”

The leader dismounted and handed his reins to a companion. “And you,” he said “Can call me Pancho.”

“Do I have the honor, sir, of addressing the infamous Pancho Villa?” Clarence asked.

“Naw, not really,” the man replied, “My name is Jose Martinez. But you can still call me Pancho.”

“Well, Jose, where are you from?” Clarence asked.

“El Paso,” Jose replied.

“And what might you gentlemen be doing out here at this ungodly hour of the morning.” Clarence persisted.

“We’re just out raising a little hell,” Jose answered.

“I’m afraid that I’m going to have to ask you boys to hold off on that,” Clarence replied evenly.

“Try and make us, old man,” Jose spat, reaching for the 9mm stuck in his waistband.

Crack! The shot knocked to Sombrero off of Jose's head.

“What the hey!” he exclaimed.

The men sitting on the horses looked around wildly trying to locate the source of the gunshot. Since the sound of the silenced round was nothing more than the sonic boom of the bullet, they were unable to find the sniper.

“There are several men in the area around us,” Clarence explained (lied), “And they can take the whole bunch of you out in the blink of an eye!”

Ron and Gary rose and slid the hammer straps off of their Colt SAA Peacemakers. They then jacked a round into the chambers of their Winchesters. The other three men rose and moved the safeties on their M-16's to the burst position.

“The way I see it,” Clarence continued, “Is that you have two choices. You can die right here, right now; or, you can ride off and go back to Mexico and not pull any more of the stunts you’ve been pulling.”

“We’ve got you out numbered, old man,” Jose spat.

“Are you sure of that?” Clarence asked.

Jose simply started at Clarence; there was no hatred in his eyes, just anger.

“Jose,” Clarence offered loud enough for Jose’s men to hear, “It is a wise leader who knows when to hold them and when to fold them. You are responsible for all of these men’s lives. We’ll leave you alive and let you explain to their families that they’re all dead because you were too proud to back down.”

Jose capitulated. “Alright, old man, Festus,” he acknowledged, “We’re leaving.”

“And Jose,” Clarence called as Jose mounted his horse, “Don’t come back, we’ll be waiting.”

The Mexicans, actually mostly Americans from El Paso, wheeled their horses and departed. As soon as they were out of sight, Clarence sat down hard.

“Here you go, partner,” Ron said, handing a pint of JD to Clarence, “Have a drink, you earned it.”

And thus ended the saga of the new ‘Pancho Villa’. Clarence, to tell the truth, had a couple of more belts from the bottle before he handed it back to Ron. Ron, noting the half empty bottle, pulled off half and handed the bottle to Gary, who finished it. They saddled their horses, Gary was only too happy to mount this time, and pointed themselves back to Columbus. When they arrived back at their tent, Clarence grabbed a change of clothes and went to grab a quick shower.

“...And so, Captain,” Ron said, “That’s the entire story. I don’t suppose those kids will be back. Clarence purely scared the crap out of them.”

“And someone else, too,” Clarence thought to himself.

May 6, 2010, Columbus, New Mexico, 0800...

They loaded their horses aboard the trailers and decided to drive straight through to *The Ark*. It was very late when they arrived and the three old geezers-Tenth Cavalry-US Marshals quickly retired. Herb and his crew saw to the horses and retired themselves.

May 7th, Long Branch Saloon, 0830...

Clarence was sitting quietly drinking his morning coffee when Ron and Gary entered.

“Morning fellas,” Clarence said, not his usual cheerful self.

“Good morning Clarence,” Ron loudly announced, cheerfully, trying to cheer Clarence.

“Man that was some boneheaded stunt I pulled,” Clarence announced.

“Forget it Clarence,” Gary replied, “What the hell, we were outnumbered and it worked. I was ready to go down fighting, but thanks to you, that didn’t happen. What made you think you could pull it off anyway?”

“Do you remember when he said his name was Jose Martinez?” Clarence asked.

“Yeah, sure, what about it?” Ron asked.

“I saw fear in his eyes,” Clarence explained. “Fear evokes the fight or flight response in

a person. I tried to give him an honorable way to flee. If I had shamed him, I'm certain he would have fought. By making him out to be a wise leader, always thinking of his men, I gave him his out."

"Regardless," Ron said, "It took real cajones to do what you did."

"Maybe," Clarence allowed, "But next time, Marshal Dillon, you handle the bad guys, and ole Chester and I will sit it out."

When the laughter died down, Clarence had returned to his old, cheerful self. Clarence wished that they had the event on video, to show everyone. Gary suggested that after they finished their coffee, they go riding. Apparently, his new horse and he had come to an understanding. They finished their coffee, saddled their horses and rode out to see how John was coming with the spring planting. John and his helpers were well along with the plowing; they should be ready to plant in a few days. They then rode over to *The Ark 2*.

"You getting used to riding a horse Gary?" Bob asked.

"After a fashion," Gary replied.

"Good," Bob smiled, "Then the 3 of you can participate in our 4th of July rodeo."

"Not on your life," Gary responded.

"But Gary," Bob continued, "The Ladies have made authentic Tenth Calvary uniforms for all three of you and we were counting on you fellas to be our flag bearers and open the rodeo."

"Well in that case..." Gary began.

"Not unless you can come up with some gen-u-wine reproduction trapdoor Springfield carbines," Clarence announced.

"And sabers," Ron added.

They said their goodbyes to Bob and rode back to *The Ark 1's* north farm. They unsaddled their horses, put up their gear and got in the pickup to return to the *Long Branch Saloon*. When they walked in, Jan was standing behind the bar.

"Get you fellas something?" Jan asked.

"Well, Miss Kitty," We'll have 3 beers," Ron replied.

Chapter Sixty – Scavenging

May 15, 2010, Long Branch Saloon, 0800...

As usual, Clarence was sitting drinking coffee when Ron and Gary walked in.

“Good morning fellas,” Clarence cheerfully greeted his friends.

“Good morning yourself,” Gary responded.

“What’s on the agenda for today?” Clarence inquired.

“I was thinking that we ought to go scavenging,” Ron answered.

“What for?” Gary inquired.

“Coffee!” Ron replied earnestly. “Do you realize how little coffee and spices we have on hand?”

“Well...no,” Gary replied. “I just assumed that we had plenty on hand.”

“We did, after we did that big scavenging trip to Denver,” Ron replied, “But there are a few things we simply can’t produce ourselves, so it’s scavenge it or do without.”

“Ron,” Clarence said, “I thought that Herb and some of the others had an on-going recovery program.”

“They do, and that’s why we haven’t run out of anything until now,” Ron replied.

“Where are you thinking about going?” Clarence asked.

“I’ve been thinking about that,” Ron replied, “I tried to think of a place where they used lots of food and the like, had a principally tourist based population, and had only limited industry.”

“What did you come up with?” Gary asked his interest peaked.

“Las Vegas!” Ron announced. “Look, those casinos have huge restaurant operations; no doubt all of their fresh goods were ordered on a daily basis. But, I’d be willing to bet, pardon the pun, that they had large stores of staples. Anyway, I figured that we could hit Vegas and then work through Flagstaff and Albuquerque on the way back.”

“If we do make a haul,” Clarence asked, “How are we going to get it back?”

“There are plenty of tractor-trailer rigs sitting around in Denver,” Ron suggested, “I figured that we could go up there, hook on to some closed trailers with our semis and

bring them back here. We could take Chris and Matt along and see if they could get some tractors running. If not, we could tow the most likely prospects back here and let them work on them.”

“Where do you want to start?” Clarence asked.

“Why not those grocery wholesalers?” Ron offered, “There were plenty of rigs sitting there.”

“Ron?” Clarence asked, “Did we ever look inside of those trailers parked at the wholesalers?”

“Aw crap,” Ron groaned, “We sure didn’t! I just assumed that they were empty.”

“Maybe some of them are,” Clarence counseled, “But why would an empty truck be sitting at a wholesaler’s? More likely, those were waiting to be unloaded.”

May 16, 2010, The Ark, 0600...

They left early the day following their conversation. Chris and Matt were along with a toolbox and a few spare parts. Their convoy was small, consisting only of two armed Hummers and the 5 semi tractors. They arrived in Denver just after 0800 and went to the first grocery wholesaler.

They went from trailer to trailer, breaking the locks and looking inside. The first trailer wasn’t locked and was empty. The second trailer, locked, was full to the brim with Folgers coffee. The third trailer, locked, was full of Charmin. The fourth trailer, locked, was full of spoiled vegetables. The fifth trailer, locked, apparently loaded for a delivery to a grocery store, had a variety of merchandise including staples, cigarettes, canned goods, dried up produce and the like.

They disconnected the trailers from the tractors and with a great deal of effort, hooked the trailers to their tractors and moved on to the next wholesaler. Chris said the tractors were hopeless without completely rebuilding the engines. While the trailers gave off weak levels of radiation, the contents were uncontaminated. Once they hosed off the trailers, they were fine.

At the second warehouse, they found one truck loaded with a variety of pasta products, another with paper products including napkins, paper towels, Kleenex and feminine supplies. A third was loaded with vegetable oil, shortening and similar products. A fourth was half full of Maxwell House coffee and half full of tea products. The fifth and final trailer was from Tone’s and filled with a variety of spices. They departed for *The Ark*. Once there, they unhooked all five trailers and sent the semis back to Denver to pick up the remaining trailers and any other loaded trailers they could find.

Upon the return trip to Denver, they hooked up the 5 trailers of groceries, one of which

was a B Train, and scouted around town. They found a trailer loaded with tires, motor oil and parts at an automotive parts store. They found no more loaded trailers after an hour of looking and decided to return to *The Ark*. At a truck stop on south side of Denver, there were several parked big rigs. Several of the trailers were loaded with all manner of things. It was decided that the trailer full of shoes was the best find and it was hooked up to the B Train and they returned to *The Ark*.

May 17th...

The five semis made two trips to the truck stop south of Denver, hooking up to loaded trailers and returning to *The Ark*. By the time they had returned for the second and final time, *The Ark* was beginning to look like a truck stop itself. No matter, if push came to shove, the trailers could be used for temporary housing. In the interim, they served as temporary storage for their bountiful finds. The 20 trailers were positioned, side-by-side next to the Food building.

Ron, Clarence and Gary were seated in the *Long Branch* drinking a can of Budweiser, recovered from the truck stop.

“You still want to go to Vegas?” Clarence asked.

“In a roundabout way, yes,” Ron responded. “Considering how well we’ve done locating loaded trailers, I think that we should start a whole new recovery operation. There’s no telling how many trailers, loaded with goods of one description or another are sitting out there waiting to be recovered. What we can’t use, we can barter or sell off. Gary can put out the word by radio of things we have for available. Maybe we can persuade the Army to pass word to the various installations and get word to the settlements that they liaise with. We sure can’t run an ad in a newspaper.”

“I can do that easily enough,” Gary commented. “First, though, we are going to have to get a crew to inventory what we have for supplies. Be sure to tell them to put that old dried up produce on our compost pile; add a little water and we’ll have more fertilizer for our garden.”

The friends spent a good part of the day planning how they would go about the recovery operation and who should be assigned. Eventually, they had a plan complete enough to present at the next Town Meeting. They figured that they weren’t the first people to have the idea of scavenging from tractor-trailer rigs; but what the hell, it was worth the effort. I-40 was a major cross-country thoroughfare. There must be hundreds of trucks sitting there with goods for the taking. After all, hadn’t they seen a lot of trucks along I-40 on the way to Columbus, NM?

June 1, 2010, main room, Central, 1900 hours...

“I’ll never get used to this military time system,” Ron thought.

“Alright folks, it’s time to bring this town Meeting to order,” Ron announced, “Jan, would you read the minutes from the last meeting?”

Jan read the minutes from the previous meeting and they were accepted and approved.

“Any old business?” Ron asked.

Silence.

“Then, Gary, Clarence and I would like to bring up some new business,” Ron offered. He outlined the plan the men had come up to recover trailers from cities, towns, and truck stops along the Interstates. After a bit of discussion it was determined that they would send out a party consisting of 4 armed Hummers and the 5 semis. Each semi would carry 4 people and each Hummer 4 people. They hoped that 36 people would be enough to provide security for the returning big rigs. With the firepower provided by the Hummers, they were certain 36 people would be enough.

One person suggested that they erect a warehouse on the south farm to store the goods that were subject to freezing, such as canned goods. That suggestion was adopted wholeheartedly. Another person suggested that Herb needed to get more wind turbines to supply the south farm with electricity. That suggestion was adopted, too.

Herb and a crew left for Palm Springs the next morning, June 2nd. When they returned, the semis would be turned around and the salvage operation would begin. Clarence roughed out some plans for a large warehouse and began to inventory his building materials. He had just enough materials for one large building. He gathered a crew and supervised the construction of the building.

Gary had turned over the routine operations of the radio shack to a group of earnest young Ham operators. He was, for all practical purposes, retired. Ron planned to retire as an active member of the governing group of the *Homeowners Association* and was going to recommend Don for the job. Come July 1st, he too would be retired. This was Clarence’s last construction project. A couple of the men he had been working with were more than capable of handling future construction projects.

July 1st, main room, The Ark, 1900 hours...

Ron submitted his resignation and nominated Don to take his place. Don and the Pueblo County deputies were so much a part of *The Ark* that there was little if any discussion and he was elected to take Ron’s place. Herb was back and they had erected 3 turbines on the south farm, one additional turbine on the north farm and were preparing to erect the 2 remaining turbines at *The Ark 2*, right after the 4th of July. The warehouse construction was well on its way and Clarence, too, announced his retirement. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.

July 2nd, Long Branch Saloon, 0830 hours...

Clarence refilled their coffee cups and set the coffeepot back on the warming plate.

“I have an idea that this retirement thing is going to be very boring,” Ron stated. “I mean hell, we saved our own lives and that of our families and others, we saved Colorado from a plague of cons, we eliminated a third of the Arab terrorists and we rescued the nation from Pancho Villa.”

“Aw hell partner,” Gary responded, “We’ve earned our rest. What do you want to do?”

“I want to get me a Chevy Silverado and ‘see the USA in my Chevrolet’,” Ron smirked. “What say fellas, how about we get 3 new pickups, horse trailers, some travel trailers and travel around this great country for a while?”

“It won’t be easy Ron,” Clarence allowed, “In fact it will be a lot of work.”

“I don’t care, I want to visit all 49 states on the North American continent,” Ron insisted.

“Forty-eight sates,” Gary corrected.

“Forty-nine,” Ron insisted, “We’re also going to visit the state of Jefferson.”

“Jefferson is a myth,” Gary insisted.

“Like hell,” Ron snapped back, they even had a website when the Internet was up. Anyway, we can get some new pickups in Pueblo, probably find 3 new tandem 2 horse trailers, too. Plus, I saw a several nice travel trailers sitting on a lot.

We can get Chris convert them to sleep additional people, figure we’d need 2 Hummer’s for protection, 3 pickups for us and our wives, 1 tanker to haul our fuel, and 3 pickups to haul our travel trailers. If we get a few more travel trailers, and only use young couples to drive the extra vehicles, there should be an optimum convoy size. We can put top-pers on all of the pickups and haul food in our three. We can haul feed for the horse, spare parts, etc. in the other pickups.”

“I don’t know if Sharon will go along with that,” Gary said.

“Hogwash Gary,” Ron said, “How many times have I heard her say that she wanted to see Jamestown?”

“Then, I’ll put a Ham rig in our trailer,” Gary responded.

“I’m sure that Lucy would love to see Tennessee again,” Clarence offered.

“When do you want to leave?” Gary asked.

“Let’s get Chris and Matt on the project of getting the pickups, travel trailers and horse trailers,” Ron said. “I say we leave as soon as we can get ready, maybe 10 days.”

On July 3rd, a group of residents, led by Chris visited Pueblo, and appropriated the necessary vehicles. All had Cummins diesel 6BT engines. They also picked up a tanker load of diesel fuel. After consulting with their wives, the 3 men sought out several young couples that might be interested in seeing the country. They found plenty of volunteers.

Chapter Sixty-one – Odyssey

July 4th, 2010...

The military joined the Independence Day festivities as they had for several years. The high point of the day came when Ron, Gary and Clarence announced their plans for a trip around the country. They would be leaving as soon as possible and could be gone a year or more, depending on how the trip went. Upon hearing of the men's plans, one of the Mormon men offered to loan 6 four-year-old Arabian mares to the men and their wives.

When someone inquired about horses for the travels companions, the men were stumped. Chris said there were a couple of 6 horse trailers in Pueblo, why didn't he pick them up and more new pickups to pull them. By the end of the day, someone had done the entire math for the men, recruited more people and everything was set.

About an hour before the rodeo was to begin, General Jamison presented the three men with sabers and Herb came carrying 3 boxes. Opening the boxes revealed 3 brand new replica Springfield trapdoor carbines. The men were already dressed in their replica uniforms and the Tenth Calvary acted as the color guards for the rodeo. They carried 3 flags, a US flag, a Confederate States of America flag and a Colorado state flag. Few noticed that the US flag had 51 stars.

July 6th, 2010...

The caravan departed around 10am. They had decided to swing west to California, drive north to Washington State and then head east bound for New York. If winter came early, they would detour south to warmer climes and return to the north the following summer. They planned to give the old capital a wide berth. The men had their entire gun collections, plenty of ammo, food, fuel and spare parts. Their young companions were all married couples, many from *The Ark 2*. One Hummer had a Ma Deuce, the other carried Thumper, brought out of retirement for the occasion. One of the young people decided to keep a diary of the trip.

Day 1 – July 6, 2010

We left *The Ark* around 10am. First stop was Capitan Volcano Nat'l Mon. in NM. Interesting. Back to Raton. Stopped at Ft. Union north of Las Vegas, NM. Old guys dress up in 10th Cav. uniforms and paraded around. Funny. Spent night in Santa Fe.

Day 2 – July 7, 2010

Didn't slow down in Albuquerque, p/u I-40. Stopped for lunch at El Malpais Nat. Mon. Spent night at Painted Desert Vis. Ctr.

Day 3 – July 7, 2010

Drove to meteor crater 20 miles west of Winslow. Old guys saddled up and circled crater by horseback. Spent night here.

Day 4 – July 8, 2010

Drove west p/u 89 north to Grand Canyon. Magnificent view. 64 south to Red Lake. Heard someone outside of camp area during night.

Day 5 – July 9, 2010

Drove to Needles, stopped for day. Quiet night.

Day 6 – July 10, 2010

Drove to Edwards AFB. General Jamison had notified them we were coming thru. Spent night on base.

Day 7 – July 11, 2010

Drove to Acton. Ghost town. Pushed on to San Fernando Valley. Took fire from apparent gang. P/u 101 west. Stopped west of Ventura.

Day 8 – July 12, 2010

Drove to Solvang. Town in ruins. Gary and Ron checked knife shop, found several good knives under counter in back room. Spent night in Pismo Beach.

Day 9 – July 13, 2010

Drove to Hearst Castle on highway 1. Completely looted. Drove to Big Sur. Spent night. About 1am, we took fire from someone. We fanned out and caught a group of 7 men and women. They had no explanation for being in area. Old guys disposed of them.

Day 10 – July 14

We decided to skip San Francisco. Drove to Gilroy and took 152 to I-5. Drove past Sacramento and spent night in Red Bluff.

Day 11 – July 15

Drove thru Redding and stopped in Ashland. Ron told story of state of Jefferson. Might have been state except for WW II. Less than 2 weeks on road and everyone tired of traveling.

Day 12 – July 16

Laid over for day. We all went riding. Spirits lifted. Leave for Portland in morning.

Day 13 – July 17

Skirted Portland and stopped on I-84 east of The Dalles. Old guys talking about cutting trip short. They look really tired.

Day 14 – July 18

Drove thru Boise to Mountain Home AFB. Ron had Commander send message to Ft. Carson.

Day 15 – July 19

Drove to Ogden and took cutoff to I-80. Men drove straight thru to Cheyenne and picked up I-25 south. Arrived back at *The Ark* very late.

The men had finally accepted that they weren't as young as they once were. They pulled into the north farm, unloaded the horses and went to sleep in the trailers. Ron was awakened by pounding on his door just after dawn on July 20th.

"Wake up Ron," Herb called.

Ron half staggered to the door, opened it and said, "Oh, it's you Herb."

He let Herb in and Linda made coffee. "What are you doing back so soon?" Herb asked, "You've only been gone 2 weeks."

"We ran into minor trouble at Big Sur. We handled the problem, but it sort of drained us. We got to talking and this traveling thing isn't what we expected. Half way across Oregon, we were ready to pack it in. Did General Jamison get the message to you?"

"Got the message; half expected to see you folks back all shot up or something," Herb replied.

"With my heart and Gary's diabetes, we couldn't keep up a decent pace. I think Clarence has heart trouble too, but he hasn't said anything," Ron continued. "It's probably better if we sit around the *Long Branch* and enjoy our retirement. The wives were ready to pack it in, too. Sorry we had to disappoint the young people."

Herb made a mental note to have Fred check out Clarence. When the folks were ready to leave for compound 1, he got the young people to drive the trucks. Once at the compound, many people pitched in and unloaded the trucks. The wives returned to their homes, probably to get some more sleep; they looked beat.

Fred took Clarence to the medical shop and ran an EKG. There was some arrhythmia there so he put Clarence on an appropriate heart medication. Maybe they could get an Army doc to check Clarence out better. He prescribed plenty of rest, but told Clarence to be sure and walk a mile a day. Clarence left, purportedly to go home, but actually to join his friends at the *Long Branch*.

“Hey fellas,” Clarence said as he entered the *Long Branch*. “Isn’t it awfully early in the day to be drinking?”

“What did Fred say?” Ron demanded.

“Oh nothing much, a little problem with my heart.” Clarence replied, “Gave me a pill and told me to get plenty of rest. Then in the next breath, he told me to walk a mile a day. Also said to take an aspirin a day. Hell, I’ll have a beer, too.”

They sat there and drank beer until noon. Then they rose as one and returned to their homes. None of them woke before 10am the next day. None of them made it to the *Long Branch* that day. They were bone tired and their heads hurt a little, too.

July 22, Long Branch, 0900...

One by one they drifted in, got their coffee and sat at ‘their’ table. No one much felt like visiting and they made a little small talk until Don came in.

“Good morning fellas, it’s good to have you back. We missed you,” Don greeted them.

“Morning Don,” they mumbled.

“What’s been going on here in the two YEARS (actually weeks) since we left,” Ron asked.

“Herb finished the wind turbines and the storage warehouse is completed,” Don replied. “So far, the salvage crew has brought in 15 trailers. You’d be surprised at the stuff we’ve come up with.”

“That means that we’ve added 35 40’ trailer loads of goods in less than two months,” Ron surmised.

“Right you are, Ron,” Don acknowledged, “We’ve completely ringed the new warehouse with trailers. We are parking the empties off to the side a ways. We will probably end up with another ring of trailers before the end of summer. One of those enterprising young Ham’s setup a RTTY link with Ft. Carson using a computer from one of the trucks that was brought in. He set up a simple database of our entire inventory. We sent a hard copy to Carson and they set up a small unit to facilitate distribution of our excess goods. The military needs some of the stuff and several settlements have made their needs known.”

“What’s the military’s cut in the business?” Gary asked.

“Not much really,” Don explained, “We negotiated a meat contract with them in your absence. Gave them right fair prices. And, they’ve passed along what we’re doing to the other settlements. Some were already doing it, but you’d be surprised how many hadn’t thought of it. We can ship most things by rail, so transportations not a problem. The only real problem is communications.”

“Don, that shouldn’t be a problem,” Gary said, “The RTTY set up can be a poor man’s Internet. There are one hell of a lot of Ham’s into RTTY. If we could get each settlement up on RTTY, all we would need is a central clearing house where a master inventory of goods everywhere was maintained. It would take a bunch of people, but it could be done.”

“That’s what Jamison suggested, or at least hinted at,” Don responded. “Anyway fellas, with our salvage operation and our trade operation, we are wholly self-sufficient at the moment. By the time we run out of essential goods, the manufacturing sector should be up and running. Cities like Denver will become regional distribution centers, supplying the surrounding area. Denver, itself will not because of the Rocky Flats event. Colorado Springs will probably take Denver’s place.”

“I’m glad to hear that we are wholly self-sufficient for the moment Don,” Ron replied, “That was one of our original goals.”

“But wait,” Don chuckled, “There’s more. One of the first five trailers brought in was a semi load of parts for Cummins diesel engines. Chris and Matt have been hauling in every semi-tractor they can find with a Cummins diesel engine. We are going to have to come up with more building materials. They plan to open a shop and rebuild the motors over the winter months.”

“Hell Don, we’ve stripped Pueblo, Colorado Springs and part of Denver of building materials,” Clarence said.

“Denver is a big city Clarence, if we can’t find an erectable steel building, there’s enough building materials to build dozens of buildings,” Don laughed, “We have a team in Denver scouting for a steel building right now. The background radiation in Denver is too high for people to live or work there. But, if you limit your exposure, you can get in and out for periods of time. We may end up building another warehouse next year. Herb even picked up a short-term contract reloading .223 caliber ammo for Carson. They are supplying the materials and he has that big reloading press running continuously.”

“I...we never dreamed that our little hideaway would turn into an industrial town,” Ron laughed.

“Now that we’re back on the gold standard,” Don added, “You folks can convert your

gold into US gold and/or silver coins. People have pretty much lost faith in paper money. Of course, the Denver mint won't reopen any time soon, again due to Rocky Flats, but Philadelphia is cranking out coins and there's talk of re-opening the San Francisco mint. And, until December 31, 2010, you can redeem your paper money in gold or silver coin." (Gold and Silver Eagles are minted at the West Point Mint)

Chapter Sixty-two – Industry

July 23rd, *Long Branch*, 0900...

With another good night's sleep the 3 friends were beginning to feel a little more like their former selves. They were enjoying their morning coffee when Don joined them.

"Morning fellas," Don greeted them.

"Good morning Don," a cheerful Clarence responded. "How are you today?"

"I'm fine and I have great news today," Don smiled.

"Oh?" Ron inquired.

"The salvagers got in late last night. We have five more truckloads of merchandise," he reported. "And, the people we sent to Denver came in, too. We are sending all five semis and both 5-ton trucks to Denver today to start emptying out the warehouse they found nearly full of prefabricated building sections. I contacted Jamison at Carson and he will supply some troops and trucks and help us. Got to run fellas; have a good day!"

"Well, that was good news," Clarence smiled.

"Yep," Ron agreed. "We'd better take care of returning those Arabians to that fella over at *The Ark 2*. I hate to do it, that's some fine horse flesh."

They finished their coffee and got in a pickup to drive over to *The Ark 2*. They located Jon, the man who had supplied the horses and explained that the horses were stabled at the north farm; he could pick them up whenever he wanted or, they would have someone herd them back to him.

"Gentlemen," Jon said, "I didn't expect to see those horses again. You don't suppose that I could interest you in buying them, do you?"

"Well sure!" Ron replied excitedly, "How much are you asking?"

"Four ounces of gold for each mare?" Jon asked, "And I'll throw in the tack and stud services."

Ron, Clarence and Gary excused themselves to discuss Jon's offer. The price seemed fair, but what the hell did they know. Still, the free stud service meant that they could build their own herd of the fine horses. After several seconds of conversation, they turned to Jon.

"You've got yourself a deal partner," Ron replied. "We'll have to go home to pick up the money, though."

“No rush fellas,” Jon said, “I’ll draw up a bill of sale for you and you can have it when you drop off payment.”

They returned to the *Long Branch*. Gary’s cousin John was sitting there drinking a cup of coffee.

“What you old farts been up to?” John asked, “Heard you cut the trip short.”

“Afraid so John,” Gary replied, “We bit off more than we could chew.”

“John,” Ron asked, “We just bought six Arabian mares from Jon over at *The Ark 2*, gave four ounces of gold for each of the horses. Did we get a good deal?”

John nearly choked on his coffee. When his coughing fit was over, he managed to speak.

“I seen them horses,” he responded, “They would have brought as much as \$4,000 each 6 years ago. What did you do, pull down on the guy and tell him to sell or you’d shoot him?”

“No, that was his asking price,” Ron replied.

“Merry Christmas fellas,” was all that John could manage.

They decided not to mention the free stud services; John didn’t look like he’d survive another coughing fit.

August 1st, Long Branch, 0900...

It had taken a dozen semis two trips to empty the warehouse of all of the prefabricated building sections and parts. They had found plans for all types of buildings in the offices of the building distributor. Chris and Matt were in Denver today, recovering tools and equipment from a diesel engine service center. If they had time, they planned on visiting the Sears warehouse to see if they could locate a couple of the Craftsman complete tool sets. They had both 5-ton trucks with them.

Having finished their morning coffee, the 3 men decided to drive over to the south farm and see what progress was being made. They piled in a pickup and drove over to Clarence’s warehouse. The trailers had been moved away from the southern end of the warehouse and a large group of people was pouring the slab for the second warehouse. A smaller crew was grading for a slab, presumably for Chris’s garage. Not wishing to interfere, they got out of the pickup, set up 3 lawn chairs and ‘supervised’ the construction from a distance.

Around noon, Don showed up with a large picnic basket.

“The Ladies put together some lunch for you fellas,” he smiled. “Can’t be interrupting your ‘supervising’ for something as trite as lunch, now can we?”

“Don, I don’t know how you do it,” Clarence said between bites.

“What do you mean?” Don asked.

“You were pretty busy being Sheriff,” Clarence continued, “Now you seem to have time to spend 16-18 hours a day overseeing *The Ark*.”

“Oh, I resigned as Sheriff,” Don said, “Guess I forgot to mention that. Bill is acting Sheriff now. Besides, law enforcement is a hell of a lot easier these days. The settlements seem to pretty much police themselves. There hasn’t been a vehicle accident since, well, I don’t remember since when.”

“This lemonade tastes like the real thing,” Gary commented, “Are we growing lemons now?”

“No,” Don smiled, “But there’re lots of lemons down in Phoenix. We worked out a trade with some folks down that way for a couple of truckloads of lemons and other citrus products.”

The three watched for most of the day. Later in the afternoon, floodlights were setup. Apparently, they intended to do a continuous pour until the 100’ by 200’ slab was done. The grading for the garage slab was done and workmen were busy constructing forms for that slab. It was getting late in the season, the men decided, most likely the construction would be continued on an around-the-clock basis until the buildings were up. Weary from their ‘supervision’ duties, the men adjourned to the *Long Branch*.

Ron and Clarence sat nursing beers; Gary resigned himself to his usual iced tea; he didn’t drink very often, diabetes and alcohol didn’t mix. He only allowed himself a drink on special occasions and usually had to adjust his insulin as a result.

August 5th, south farm...

The slabs were in and barely cured. Already construction crews were busy erecting the new warehouse and the garage. The men watched in total amazement at the speed with which the buildings were being erected. Herb was off on another trip to Palm Springs to pick up additional wind turbines for the south farm, their new industrial center.

Not wishing to interfere with the salvage operation, he had borrowed semis from the Army at Ft. Carson. Already, a small crew was constructing foundations for the new wind turbines. By the end of the day, the sides for the garage had been erected and the warehouse was well on the way. A couple of days would see the garage completed and

the warehouse roofing would begin.

Chris and Matt had a successful trip to Denver. They had all of the special tools, repair manuals and all of parts that they could get from the diesel engine service center. The trip to the Sears warehouse had yielded 6 of the top-of-the-line Craftsman tool sets, enough for one for each bay of the garage. They had motor lifts, motor stands, drill presses, bench grinders, a hydraulic press, and workbenches, bolt cabinets, an acetylene torch, jacks, and everything one would expect to find in a major truck service center. They left the 'goodies' on the trailers covered with tarps.

'Labor Day', 2010...

Only a small contingent came down from Ft. Carson; most of the troops were in California, finishing cleaning up Los Angeles. General Jamison marveled at the completed garage and warehouse. He was even more surprised to learn that a group of 'nerds' from *The Ark 2* had set up a client-server computer network for the entire compound.

He would, he said; supply some communications gear that would allow the computer network to be hooked into the unsecure military communications net, the current day equivalent of the Internet. Another year should see full restoration of telephone service, possibly even Al Gore's Internet. Some of the young people wanted to know who Al Gore was. Was he a scientist? And what was the Internet?

A system, similar to E-Bay was now running on the unsecure net. Another Bulletin Board system posted Wanted and Available merchandise. The system, under total military control no longer provided the porn sites nor allowed clearly racist bulletin boards. And, since the system was totally within the control of the military, people didn't need to worry about the FBI intercepting their communications.

A bright and sunny day gave way to clouds and a cold front. The festivities were hurriedly moved inside and continued. Later that evening, snow began to fall. The brief snowstorm suggested to the residents that they were in for a long and cold winter this year.

It continued to snow on and off until, according to longtime Colorado residents, the worst snowfall in history had occurred. After the first, early, snowfall the cattle were gathered up and confined to a dry-lot. John didn't want a repeat of the event of a few years back where they had to haul hay to the cattle spread out over 600 acres. The hogs were now kept in a confinement building, the herd having grown so big. A new methane operation had been constructed on the north farm and it produced so much methane that they were able to compress the gas and supply methane to the Army for their use.

The General had made good on his promise and they now had access to the unsecure military net. A television transmitter had been installed at Ft. Carson and they were now able to get a single TV channel, channel 6, the Armed Forces Network. The only real

good that they got from the television was the weather forecasts. And, they had gotten them before by radio, so the TV was rarely turned on.

Thanksgiving Day, 2010...

A blizzard of monumental proportions had hit the day before, forcing the shutdown of the wind turbines. All of the generators, now replaced with natural gas generators (methane is natural gas), had kicked in and they were wholly dependent on the generators for power. Since the generator capacity had not kept pace with the wind turbine capacity, it was necessary to shut down all nonessential operations until the blizzard had passed. Despite the howling wind and blowing snow, the residents were enjoying their Thanksgiving.

Right up until someone who had been listening to the radio came in and announced, "They got a foot of snow in Los Angeles and it's still snowing. They are bracing for record low temperatures in the Phoenix area and have the smudge pots burning to try and save their citrus trees."

The blizzard continued unabated for several days. When finally it stopped, the old Ford NAA tractor and a blade were used to push the snow from the confines of the compound. Had the residents not continually shoveled snow; even at the height of the blizzard, the tractor couldn't have handled the snowfall. Don called for an emergency meeting of the homeowners on December 1st.

December 1st, 2010, main room, Central, 1900 hours...

"All right folks, let's have some order here," Don announced.

"We have another major winter storm headed our way. I've had crews out all day clearing paths through the snow. We had drifts as high as 20' deep. If Clarence hadn't built the roofs with so steep a pitch, you wouldn't be getting any power from those fancy roofs of yours. We've brought in extra supplies from the warehouse and they are stacked at the back of the room here.

"Take what you need, but don't overdo it. We're using Sno-Cats to bring in supplies as fast as we can. We need to move the residents from the house trailers into the inner compound because their mobile homes are freezing. I've posted a signup list on the bulletin board for people who can take in boarders. The rest will just have to put up here in Central."

"How bad is it going to get Don?" Clarence asked.

"Clarence, I have no idea," Don replied, "but I can tell you that they got another foot of snow in Los Angeles and two feet in San Francisco."

Herb held up his hand to get Don's attention. When Don nodded to him, he said, "We're

going to have to locate more generators in the spring. These wind turbines are all fine and dandy, but when the wind blows this hard, they're worthless. Also, come spring we're going to have to make a trip or two to the ski resorts and bring back all of the Sno-Cats we can find. I presume that Chris and Matt can get them running."

John held up his hand. Don nodded to him. "If it's a late spring and an early winter again next year, we're going to have to change the varieties of crops were planting. We got all of the crops in ok this year, but with the number of cattle we're feeding, we'll need to construct more silos on the north farm. Right now, we're playing hell getting the silage from *The Ark 2* to the north farm to feed the cattle." He went on to detail all of the problems that the heavy snowfall was creating.

By the time the meeting was over, they had a list of tasks to be completed during the spring and early summer. More generators, Sno-Cats and silos; maybe a tunnel from the warehouse to *The Ark 1* compound. (Sno-Cats are a product of Tucker Sno-Cat Corporation)

Chapter Sixty-three – The Never Ending Snow

Christmas Day, 2010, The Ark...

The snowstorm Don had warned of on the 1st materialized as promised. It had hardly stopped snowing when they were hit with another, smaller snowstorm. Then, yesterday, another blizzard hit. They had been running on generators for most of the winter. During the lulls, the wind turbines were put back online and the generators serviced. They could ill afford to have a generator down this winter.

After Christmas dinner, Ron, Gary and Clarence gathered in the security office. There was 25' of wind-drifted snow piled between the compound and the Youth Center/Long Branch Saloon. The men were a little depressed; being cooped up in their homes had worn on their dispositions.

"You know what we need to do?" Clarence asked no one in particular.

"What partner?" Ron responded.

"When we put in the tunnel system to connect the warehouse to this compound," Clarence continued, "We need to connect everything to the compound by tunnel. We can start at the Food Building, run a tunnel to the Youth Center and from there to this compound. We'll make those tunnels using the same molds we used to build the tunnel to *The Ark 2*. The tunnel from the warehouse to the compound, we will make bigger. Say 10' wide and 7' high. We can get some electric golf carts or Cushman vehicles or something and build some small wagons or trailers that they can pull. It will beat the hell out of lugging the stuff all the way from the warehouse."

"While you're at it Clarence," Gary said brightening to the idea, "Why not connect the two warehouses and Chris's garage with tunnels, too? Make those tunnels oversized like the tunnel from the warehouse to the compound."

"Hell, bells, boys," Clarence said smiling and slapping the table, "I may just have to come out of retirement!"

"Gary and I will continue to supervise," Ron laughed.

"I'm hungry," Ron announced, "What do you suppose we can do to round up a sandwich?"

"Ron," Gary smiled, "As long as you want a ham sandwich, you can have any kind of sandwich you want."

Right then and there Ron vowed to get someone to shovel out the Food Building; because of the storms, they hadn't had fresh meat in weeks. He couldn't look another

piece of ham in the eye. At least, if they could access the Food Building, they could pull some meat out of the freezers.

It seemed that there was always a lesson to be learned. And, by God, he vowed, if they could dig out the Food building they could damn well dig out the *Long Branch*. Then, at least, they could play pool. Another byproduct of their scavenging trips, the pool table was a real quality item. They weren't very good pool players, but it didn't matter, it was something to do that was different.

January 1, 2011, Long Branch, 0900...

A long narrow passageway had been cut through the snow to the Youth Center/*Long Branch* and from there to the Food Building. As insurance to keep the passage ways open, someone had the idea of wedging sheets of plywood into the snow to form a roof and thus a tunnel that would remain open when, not if, it snowed again. It was, in fact snowing again. They got some popcorn popping in the popper, which had been moved from the main room to the Youth Center. Quite a few men had gathered to watch an old tape of Dale Earnhardt's last race. Later in the day, they'd probably play another of the Super Bowl tapes and Gary would get lost.

The wind didn't come up so the snowstorm didn't become a blizzard; nevertheless, it added another 9" of snow. And so it went; the last snowstorm of the season came on April 15th. The snow, without doubt a record or close to it, didn't melt off until the last week of May. Just as Cousin John had predicted, they were late getting into the fields. As soon as they were able to get out and around, Herb hit the road looking for generators. Clarence came out of retirement and supervised the construction of the tunnels; Gary and Ron supervised Clarence.

The residents of *The Ark* never threw anything away; they never knew when they might need it again. Consequently, when it came time to erect more silos on the north farm, they had the forms and with the help of the men from *The Ark 2*, they erected 3 additional silos in very short order.

John had plenty of hay and the like so he decided to plant all 500 acres in corn. He figured if he ran short of something, he could talk to the folks at Ark II. Next year, he vowed, he'd better figure on planting the 400 or so acres of the south farm in crops, too. He planned to let the cattle out to graze on the north farm for the last time ever this year. The land was too valuable to waste on grazing. They needed it for hay, oats and the other crops.

Herb returned around the first of July with three 300kw gaseous powered generators. He installed one on each of their three sections of ground and tied them together in their own miniature grid. Chris and Matt were catching up on time lost due to the severe winter and were putting out one rebuilt semi a week.

July 4th, 2011, The Ark...

The military had finished cleaning up Los Angeles and was well represented at the annual event. A rodeo was planned for again this year; so Clarence, Gary and Ron were dressed up in their uniforms, ready to bear the colors to start the mini-event. Lt. General Jamison was present and brought Lt. Col. Olsen a present, a box containing a pair of small eagles. However, commensurate with his new rank, Col. Olsen could no longer liaise with *The Ark* for Ft. Carson. He was appointed as commander of a group of Abrams tanks that had recently transferred to Ft. Carson from Ft. Hood in Texas. He would be allowed to commute between *The Ark* and Carson unless circumstances required him to be at the post.

Barbeque was the theme dish of this 4th of July and anything that could be barbequed was, with pork being the primary meat. For the beef lovers, there were several Texas style barbecued beef briskets. After an unsurpassed feast, they held the rodeo. The only thing missing that day was the fireworks display; or in Chris's opinion, a stock car race. It was a good, old-fashioned 4th of July.

After the events of the day, the three old troopers retired to the *Long Branch* for a night-cap. As they set sipping a bourbon and branch, Clarence wondered aloud about the coming winter.

"I saw a TV show once on The Learning Channel or the Discovery Channel or the National Geographic channel," he said, "They talked about ice ages. It seems that every ice age was preceded by a period of global warming. Then, as if someone had flipped a switch, the ice would come. I could be wrong, fellas, but I seem to recall that it came on really fast, perhaps in a period as short as ten years; or, maybe it was 100 years. Hell, I don't remember. But, I'm telling you, if we have a winter this year like last year, I'm going to start to worry."

"Clarence, it was just a freak winter," Gary assured his friend.

"Still..." Clarence was unconvinced.

"Tell you what partner," Ron offered, "If we have another Ice Age, I'll trade you a snowmobile for your horse!"

Labor Day, 2011...

The grand celebration planned for 'Labor Day' had to be cancelled because of snow. Although the snow lasted only a short while, everyone got a little nervous. Most of the harvesting was done because they had used shorter maturity crops. They had just finished harvesting the potatoes. There was squash and pumpkin to bring in, but they would wait until the last possible moment to harvest them. The snow melted off and the nervousness passed. However by mid-September, a large storm front was moving their way and they rushed to finish the harvest of the garden.

The absolute fury of the storm took them by surprise. It wasn't like the 'bad old days' when TV bombarded you with up to the minute warnings, guesses and who knew what. The only way to find out what a storm was like was to experience it. The cattle were back on the dry lot and the entire lot had been covered, overhead and on 3 sides to shield the animals from the worst of the storms.

After the 4th of July, a group had made a run up to Vail and Aspen. They had a total of 6 Sno-Cats now and Chris and Matt had them in perfect working order. They were housed in Chris's garage, ready to go at a moment's notice. So, as the old song said, *Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow...* It did! (Vaughn Monroe)

By Thanksgiving, the accumulated snowfalls exceed that of the previous year. Still, with the tunnel system and everything they had done this past year, just in case, they were far better off. After a splendid Thanksgiving dinner, the three 'old guys' snuck off to their favorite hideaway, the *Long Branch*.

"I want 4 snowmobiles, for my horse, Ronald," Clarence said.

"Clarence, I keep telling you it's a fluke," Gary insisted. "I agree that the snowfall last year and this year is not normal, maybe it's one of those El Niño or La Niña things. Who knows? But, it hasn't snowed in Los Angeles this year and there's been nothing on the radio about any citrus crops being threatened like last year. This too shall pass." (El Niño=hot; La Niña=cold; with, on average, five year intervals. It is characterized by variations in the temperature of the surface of the tropical eastern Pacific Ocean)

"Yeah partner, remember what it was like last Thanksgiving?" Ron consoled his friend. "That was a nasty storm. Besides, now that we're prepared for it, it won't happen. If we didn't have those fine tunnels, extra generators and a fleet of Sno-Cats, then we would be in for a real blow. But, it's just like we've done all along, prepared for the worst and been able to avoid it. Look at ole Thumper hanging on the wall there. We only used him a few times. But, because we were prepared, we were almost invincible. We're prepared for the weather. It can't hurt us!"

True to Gary and Ron's prediction, the snow let up and aside from a few flurries, they had no more snow between Thanksgiving and Christmas. They were able to plow out the roads around the farms and it looked to be a near normal winter for the rest of the season. Christmas Day brought the usual gift exchange in the homes and community Christmas dinner. There were many special treats this Christmas, salads made with pineapple and other rare fruits. Cranberries, traded for with a bunch of growers on Cape Cod; turkeys, another trade with some farmers in Iowa; fresh strawberries from a fella named Jose Martinez and his wife down in El Paso (how he ever found the Marshals was anybody's guess); and gallons of freshly frozen ice cream for dessert.

"I ate too much partner," Ron groaned.

"I seem to remember hearing that a lot, before," Clarence laughed stuffing another

spoonful of ice cream and fresh strawberries in his mouth.

“Clarence, I am purely amazed,” Gary said, “You really made an impression on old Pancho Villa; it would appear that he’s turned over a new leaf.”

Clarence puffed up his chest a little. “Funny thing was I remember seeing fear in his eyes. Good thing he didn’t know I was more afraid than he was.”

“It’s a good life, my friends,” Ron commented.

March 23, 2012...

The last snowfall of the season came on Gary’s 69th birthday. It was hardly enough to bother with, barely a skiff. Maybe spring would come early this year.

Chapter Sixty-four – Growth

May 1, 2012, Long Branch, 0900...

Don, Ron, Clarence and Gary were discussing Don's plan to replace all of the mobile homes with the highly efficient slip form construction. He had a map of the compound.

"Look here," Don said, "If we complete the third ring, it will add 24 homes and replace the trailers my deputies are occupying. If we built a fourth ring, that would add another 34 homes. With the kids growing up and getting married, we are going to need those additional homes eventually. Our 12 Hispanic families will occupy 12 of the homes on the outer ring. With the marriages we've had, 6 more of those homes will go to the new families. That will leave us with 16 vacant homes; but fellas, they won't be empty long."

"I suppose that we could recycle the materials on the awnings," Clarence offered. "That would provide the electrical roofing and solar heating for the 24 homes in the third tier and 12 of the homes in the fourth tier. But what are we going to do for the 22 remaining homes in the fourth tier?"

"You fellas are a little out of touch with the results of our salvage efforts," Don replied. "We have enough of those 'electric shingles', as you call them to handle the 22 homes and possibly even a fifth ring. And, Colonel Olsen trained several people in the construction of the solar heating panels, as you may recall."

"Don, there are other things to consider," Clarence continued his objections, "There's the matter of gas and water for the 22 extra homes; electricity too. And, our septic system can't possibly handle one more home."

"Clarence, several of us have been working on this proposal for some time," Don responded. "We propose to completely replace the existing septic system with a whole new system. The drainage field will be under our garden plot at a depth of 12' and sloping down and will consist of a series of interconnected septic tanks. So far as the water system goes, we are going to replace the 3,000 gallon tank with a new 12,000 gallon tank."

"But we don't have any more rock to build homes with."

"We'll haul it in."

"That's a lot of concrete, where..."

"We have 4 train cars sitting in Pueblo filled with bulk cement."

"I give up," Clarence said, "You seem to have thought of everything."

"Probably not," Don conceded. "That's why we want the three of you to maintain an

overview of the project.”

“When do we begin?” Clarence asked.

“The crews are putting in the new septic system already,” Don smiled, “That will be completed in a couple of days and the old system will be tied into it. Another crew is already putting in the new sewer, water and electrical feeds. Herb is on the road to Palm Springs with 12 semis. He’ll bring back more wind turbines and more generators.”

Clarence was out of objections; they were way ahead of him on this one. “Anything else, Don?”

“Yes, we’re going to annex the sections to the north and south of *The Ark 1* and *The Ark 2*. With the size of our herds, we need the land for more corn insulage production,” he said. “We’ll be adding one more silo to the north farm and 2 more silos to *The Ark 2*. This will be a dawn to dusk operation lasting the whole summer. Do you think you three old geezers are up to the task?”

“Just get me a lawn chair,” Ron smiled.

“As long as all I have to do is think about it and not do it,” Gary replied, “I’m in.”

“Make that three,” Clarence smiled.

By the end of June, the septic and utility systems were installed and construction was well underway completing the 3rd tier of homes. New patio covers would be constructed and the existing solar heating left in place. As a new home was completed, the roof trusses were lifted by crane and set in place. The 22 sets of new solar heating panels were stacked awaiting installation.

Every needed appliance, e.g. wood stoves, gas kitchen stoves and gas hot water heaters had been brought from the warehouse and were stacked and covered with tarps. The construction crews, working on several homes at a time, were completing homes at the rate of one every other day.

Herb was back with 12 wind turbines and 12 additional 100kw Onan generators. They planned to install 3 turbines on each of the new sections plus a backup generator. The two extra generators would be added to *The Ark 1 and 2*. The electrical grid for the ten square mile settlement would be extended to tie in all of the new electrical equipment. The generator capacity finally exceed the wind turbine capacity and replacing the mobile homes with the more efficient stone homes greatly reduced the draw on the system due to the elimination of air conditioning totally.

July 4th, 2012, The Ark...

Every 4th of July celebration was a cause for extra joy. This year was extra special due

to the expansion of *The Ark*. General Jamison was shocked to see the expansion program underway.

“And when were done General, we’ll have 88 homes here at *The Ark 1*,” Don was explaining the dynamics of the expansion. “None of the homes will require outside electrical sources except during inclement weather. They are so efficient that they are comfortable on the hottest, most humid, summer days.

“During the winter, a small wood stove provides more than enough heat for the entire home. Our new septic system will supply enriched water to our gardens. That new water tank being constructed is 4 times the capacity of the old tank and sits 50’ higher, increasing the water pressure slightly even though it is supplying more homes.”

That’s great, Don,” Jamison replied. “On the national front, communities like yours are growing rapidly. There has been a wholesale redistribution of assets. Each settlement has taken your lead and tried to become wholly self-sufficient. Because of the changes in demographics, the demand for petroleum products has been reduced to the point where the US can supply all of its own needs without any imports from the Middle East, Mexico or Argentina.

“The latest estimates are that the annual mileage traveled by motor vehicles is less than 10% of the pre catastrophe mileage. They now have a vaccine for SARS and, probably because most everyone is off their backsides and working, early indications are that the life expectancies may be increasing.

“Congress is redefining the role of the US military, due in large part to the experiences of General Robinson with your community and others like it. He is the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Defense of this country from foreign countries is primarily the responsibility of the US Navy and Marine Corps. The US Army and Air Force are being integrated and a single military command.”

“Most settlements have,” he continued, “their own local Militia units. In times of crisis, the national combined Army/Air Force and local Militias will work together to deal with the crisis. In some ways, it’s going to be a lot like the system they used in countries like Switzerland or the former Israel; a brief period of national training for everyone when they reach the age of 18. Then the young people will be released back to their community and will be subject to call up as part of the local Militia.

“The automobile industry has restarted and is only producing vehicles that burn compressed methane,” Jamison reported. “Under government sponsorship, electrical hot water heaters, stoves and furnaces are being replaced by gas burning appliances. The goal is to have everything converted within 10 years; the only holdup is the manufacturing capacity. It’s almost humorous in a way; for years the environmentalists fought to eliminate hydrocarbon usage. Now that most of their liberal butts are dead and buried, they are getting their way.”

“Public education has become a thing of the past through the 12th grade,” he went on. “One land grant college will exist for each state. Each college will have essentially the same curriculum, Agriculture, Engineering and Medical Arts. A few will still offer schooling in so-called Liberal Arts subjects like History, but they will be few and far between. The only real use for a degree in a field like History, is to train replacement Instructors for the other colleges. Oh, listen to me, I’ve been going on for too long, is the dinner about ready?”

The ‘three old geezers’ sat taking in everything the General had to say. They looked at each other, exchanged smiles and rose to get in line for the feast. They filled their plates and joined their families. Each family group had pushed together enough picnic tables to seat the entire extended family that included as many as 4 and sometimes 5 generations. The only clique was the family unit. There was no distinction between the families of the basis of race or religion. The greater clique was *The Ark* as a whole and it was just one of hundreds, perhaps thousands of like-minded communities around the US.

America had diverse cultural origins, people from every country on the planet. If they chose to speak in their native tongue, it was kept strictly within the family. In public, everyone spoke English as a matter of choice (and a new law declaring English as the official language).

Churches, as a matter of survival, had gone through a series of mergers. In the new America, you were either Catholic, Christian, Jewish, Orthodox, or one of a handful of Oriental faiths. There were none of the hundreds of denominations that had existed before. It was rumored that the Catholic and Christian churches would eventually merge. At the moment, however, the great divide that had existed since Martin Luther had nailed his proclamation to the door of his church still existed. Progress was a journey of many steps.

After the feast, ‘the three old geezers’ mounted their Arabian mares and proudly carried the flags in the opening ceremonies of the 4th of July rodeo. Having fulfilled their duties, they passed their horses off to others to be unsaddled and groomed and quietly slipped off to the *Long Branch*.

Ron was the first to speak, “By God,” he said, “From listening to the General, it sounds as if we got it mostly right.”

“Maybe so,” Clarence allowed, “Only time will tell.”

“It just sounds like Lincoln’s dream has finally come true,” Gary offered. “Wasn’t it in his Gettysburg Address where he talked about ‘Government of the People, by the People and for the People’ not perishing from the earth?”

“I don’t remember my history that well,” Ron answered.

“Yeah, me neither,” Clarence confirmed. “But it doesn’t much matter. We were sup-

posed to have a weak central government that promoted the general welfare and provided for a common defense. It's taken 240 years more or less, but it sounds like that's what we finally ended up with."

"I agree with that," Gary added, "The state is no longer the key element in our political system; it has been supplanted by local government to which it must respond. The federal government must respond to both local and state governments. So long as we maintain strong communities, neither the state nor the federal governments will ever regain what they have lost. Well, except maybe for California," he laughed.

"What do you mean by that?" Ron asked.

"Ron, where did every major welfare scheme in the US originate?" Gary inquired.

"Uh, California?" Ron responded.

"Mostly," Gary smiled. "They supported all of their welfare programs on the backs of their citizens. Proposition 13 was a taxpayer revolt that spelled the ultimate doom of California. Faced with a continuous influx of people and an eroded tax base, their education system went into the toilet. California became a state, IMHO, of welfare recipients. Then that energy crisis led to the removal of Davis and the ascent of Arnold. I never did really figure out if Arnold was a Republican or Democrat."

"Arnold was a RINO," Ron laughed.

July 5th, The Ark...

Construction resumed the next day. By the end of July, the homes were nearing completion and several of the crews went to work on the additional silos on the north farm and at *The Ark 2*. With the abundance of soil moisture, they were looking at record crops. The garden seemed to be producing a little more than normal, perhaps the enriched water was feeding the plant roots and providing natural fertilizer. That was questionable due to the depth of the leech lines being 12' or deeper. But the water migrates to the surface, so who knows?

When the homes were finished and the people moved into them, the 36 mobile homes were moved, by mutual agreement, to *The Ark 2*. The Mormon community was happy to have the expanded housing and the residents of *The Ark 1* were happy to have the space back. The Observation Tower had long since been relegated to a primary role of fire lookout tower.

Chapter Sixty-five – On Doing Business/The Big Haul

The military's non-secure net eventually came into such widespread usage that it supplanted the old Internet. Each settlement, if it wanted, was supplied with a radio link to the nearest military base, hub, and the hubs were linked by satellite. Although telephone communications had been restored, Mil-Net remained the favorite Network.

Strict guidelines existed which limited websites to text only, non-graphic web pages. The graphics simply consumed too much bandwidth. Each community eventually had its own website where 'Wanted' and 'For Sale/Trade' were prominently featured.

The bugaboo with the system came in the absence of credit cards or a similar form of payment. The banking system had totally collapsed when the SARS catastrophe hit the world. Billions of dollars of deposits disappeared in the blink of an eye. Stocks, bonds and other investments became worthless in the same instant. The groups that were prepared for a collapse of the system, like the folks at *The Ark*, were very well off indeed, in the beginning of the reconstruction period.

At first, there was limited trading between settlements, with the occasional 'cash' transaction. Cash meant gold or silver or other precious commodity. The nation went back on the gold standard and, in time, all available gold was converted to coinage. This was all well and good, but it remained cumbersome.

Gold and/or silver payments could be paid to the railroad, which extracted a fee, and used to prepay for shipments. Or, one could order the goods COD, again with the railroads collecting a fee. Not only did this add to the cost of goods and services, it was such a bother. The railroads only charged a transaction fee, regardless of the amount of money involved. Their transaction fee just covered their costs of handling the transactions and they, to be honest, would rather have not been involved.

As a consequence, the federal congress decided to implement a banking system to accommodate business and promote the general welfare of the nation. The system would provide an account for each community. The communities could make a deposit at their nearest military installation of gold or silver and they would be issued what would in the past have been called a debit card.

Each transaction would be charged a miniscule fee, beginning at 0.25% of the transaction amount and falling off to a minimum of 0.0005% of the transaction amount for very large transactions. Translated into English, the fee for a \$100 and below transaction was 25 cents (minimum fee) and the fee for a \$1,000,000 and up transaction was \$500 (maximum fee).

To prevent computer fraud from arising from such a system, confirmations of all transactions were sent via the military's secure, encrypted radio network. Unless the settlement confirmed the transaction within 48 hours, via the same secure, encrypted radio network, the transaction wasn't processed. As more and more manufacturers came into

business, their goods were solely marketed on the Mil-Net and could only be paid for via the debit card form of payment.

In the slow moving economy of the post catastrophe country, the system was more than adequate and extremely secure. There was a new outlook in criminal justice these days. A single willful violation of the system got you ten years in a prison at hard labor. If you committed 2 violations before you were caught, you got 20 years, a deemed second offense; if you committed 3 violations before you were caught, a deemed third offense, you were tried, convicted and shot. Two months and two bullets after the system went into effect banking crimes had been eliminated.

Within the individual communities, the Treasurer, an elected official, handled the community banking system. No loans were made, no interest was paid; community members could only add their individual funds to the community pool for safeguarding. All internal community transactions were hard cash transactions or service arrangements where the laboring person was paid for his service after he/she had completed the agreed amount of labor. The entire system was crude, but effective.

Probably the best thing about the business system that came to be was that internal community non-cash transactions were matters of honor. If a dispute arose as to a transaction, the issue was brought before the community as a whole for mediation and or arbitration. Anyone found to be acting in a less than honorable way was subject to a penalty up to and including expulsion from the community. In this day and age, no one wanted to be expelled from the community. Everyone took pride in the fact that their word was their bond. Rarely was a dispute brought before the community to be resolved.

August 1, 2012...

With all of the construction projects completed or nearing completion, the three old geezers found themselves spending more and more time at their favorite haunt, the *Long Branch*. They soon bored of sitting around visiting and decided that they should begin making day trips, to visit nearby settlements, scrounging, anything to get them out of their boredom. They mentioned their plans to Don, who consulted with Herb.

August 2, 2012...

Ron, Gary and Clarence rose early and headed for Ron's truck, which he had filled the night before. They piled in, fired her up and headed to the gate. Only to be met by a Ma Deuce bearing Hummer.

"Dang it," Ron declared, "I knew we shouldn't have said anything to Don. We can handle any problems that come up."

Gary just laughed, "Partner, you've been 39 years old for 32 years now. What the hell, if they want to tag along...I say let them. There hasn't been any trouble for a long time

now. They'll get bored after a few trips and probably talk Don or Herb into letting them stay home."

They planned to check out every gun store they could in the Denver area; not so much looking for guns as looking for customer lists. They were all duded up like cowboys and wore their US Marshal badges. The first store they found was devoid of anything including records. In the second, Gary spied a little Ruger bearcat, mostly hidden by a pile of trash.

"I always wanted one of these," Gary said, "Do you fellas mind?"

Ron and Clarence shook their heads. They found the store's gun log and began to scan the transactions. They found nothing that sparked any interest. Moving on to the next store, Gary located a shoulder rig that was suitable to carry the bearcat. He took off his vest, put on the rig and put the vest back on making sure to let the holster pass through the left armhole and hang outside of the vest. He pulled the little bearcat from his hip pocket and stuck it in the holster. They found the gun log and Ron noticed that the same name appeared several times. Apparently this fellow was a collector. They went through some filing cabinets and found the yellow sheets. Ron wrote down the individual's home address and looked it up on an old map of Denver he had with him.

"Let's go check out this guy's house," Ron said, "He may not have made it and it would be a pure shame to let that fine of a collection of weapons just sit there and rust."

They followed the map to the address listed on the yellow sheet. A car was parked in the driveway, the driver's door open. They parked, got out and approached the car. The mummified remains of the driver lay half-in and half-out of the car, and the back of the mummy's head was a gaping hole.

"Fat lot of good his collection did him," Ron said.

They searched the car and the body and found nothing. Ron removed the keys from the ignition and they unlocked and entered the house, the two security men right on their heels. They searched the entire house, noting that the man was apparently single; there being no evidence of women's clothing. Everything in the house was covered with a heavy layer of dust. They found no evidence of a gun safe, and no guns anywhere. They returned to the main floor and were about to leave the residence when Clarence spoke up.

"That's mighty odd, fellas," Clarence said.

"What's odd Clarence?" Gary asked.

"Look here, Gary," Clarence said pointing to the wall at the back of the living room.

"All I see is a wall Clarence," Gary said.

“Follow me,” Clarence urged. He led Gary and Ron to the wall and down the hallway to the first door on the right. “Look in there and tell me what you see.”

“It’s a small bedroom,” Gary replied.

“Anything strike you as odd about it?” Clarence asked.

“Uh...no,” Gary replied.

“Do I have to draw you a picture?” Clarence asked.

“I guess so,” Gary replied.

“Stand in the door way and face the way we were going,” Clarence said. “Look at the distance to the back wall in the room and compare it to the distance to the end of the hall.”

“It’s about the same,” Gary replied.

“That’s right!” Clarence said. “Now turn around and do the same thing looking back the way we came.”

“Well, it’s different,” Gary said, “But that’s because there is a closet on this end of the room.”

“Look again Gary!” Clarence insisted. “How far is it to the closet wall?”

“Maybe 4’,” Gary replied.

“Check and see how deep that closet is,” Clarence insisted.

Gary walked over and looked. “It’s just a standard closet Clarence.”

“So the distance from the doorway to the other side of the wall in the back of the closet is about how far?” Clarence was getting irritated, but he had to teach these guys to use their eyes.

“Oh about 7’ I guess,” Gary replied.

“Come back to the doorway and tell me how long the wall is from the doorway to the living room.” He patiently instructed.

“Oh I don’t know, 15 or 16 feet,” Gary replied.

Ron suddenly understood, but remained quiet.

“Gary, where’s the missing 9’?” Clarence asked.

“Oh,” Gary replied, dumbfounded.

“Let’s go to the living room,” Clarence insisted.

They walked to the living room and stood facing the wall that should have been the back wall of the bedroom closet. There was a back bar and a front bar pushed back against it. They were small metal tracks buried in the carpet. Clarence pulled on the front bar and it came forward on the tracks, screeching from the lack of lubrication. When he had fully extended the front bar, there was about 4’ between it and the back bar. The tracks ran right up to the back bar. Clarence began examining the back bar.

“There has to be a latch here somewhere,” Clarence said.

“Look for a push button,” Ron suggested.

“Bad idea Ron,” Clarence said, “What if the power were out like it is now?”

For a minute or two, Clarence was at a loss; he then noticed two identical statuettes, one on either side of the back bar. He tugged on one and it slid toward the center of the back bar about 3”. He tugged on the other and it, too slid toward the center of the back bar about 3”. He stepped back and pulled on the back bar. It slowly came forward on the tracks. He pulled it as far as he could then stepped around behind the back bar and pushed it up to the front bar. Taking a flashlight, he looked in the 8+’ deep by 16’ wide room. He sucked in his breath.

“Gentlemen, I give you the man’s gun collection!” he finally announced.

The room was filled with gun cabinets covering every inch of wall space on three of the walls. Although the cabinets were glass faced to allow the firearms to be viewed, closer inspection of the cabinets showed them to be hermetically sealed. Ron noticed several desiccant blocks in each cabinet. A box of white cotton gloves lay on top of a small cabinet. Putting on a pair of the white cotton gloves, and handing gloves to his two friends, Ron asked, “Gentlemen, shall we?”

The man was into collecting commemoratives that much was certain. He had every manner of commemorative long arm and handgun. There was a small brass plate beneath every firearm that had a 3-digit number on it. The weapons were coated with some sort of protective. Between the protective coating, the desiccant blocks and the hermetical seals of the cabinets, the weapons were as pristine as the day they were manufactured.

Along the back wall sat hard shell gun cases, each with a similar brass plate bearing a 3-digit number. When they opened the lower cabinets beneath the gun cases, the her-

meticulously sealed compartments revealed case after case of ammo for the weapons. Many of the weapons were odd calibers that they didn't immediately recognize, but it was of little consequence because the more unusual the caliber, the greater was the supply of ammunition in that caliber.

One cabinet held a collection of pre-64 Winchester rifles ranging from the smallest of calibers all the way up to the .458. The man must have been a hunter, for these weapons showed a little wear. They cased the weapons, each in its own hard shell case and loaded the weapons and ammo on their truck and into the back of the Hummer. So great was their haul that they barely had room to carry it all. They returned to *The Ark*. They now had plenty to entertain them through the coming months.

Chapter Sixty-six – Squirrel Hunt

August 3, 2012, Long Branch, 0915...

“I still can’t believe our luck,” Ron said.

“What do you mean Ron?” Gary asked. “You specifically went looking for a gun collector. You found one and we uh...Clarence found his guns. What don’t you believe?”

“I figured if we got lucky maybe we’d find a couple of dozen guns, not 84!” Ron replied.

“What did you expect?” Gary asked, “The fella was driving a BMW; that 2-story mansion must have set him back over a million dollars; and, he was single, apparently. I have a question for you. I wouldn’t want to store those weapons in their hard cases for a long period of time; what are we going to do to store them?”

“Why don’t we go back up there and get the gun cases?” Ron asked.

“Heck, Ron, Those cases are big and heavy,” Clarence pointed out. “I’m not even sure they would fit through the door to that room! We might have to bust out the wall.”

“Tell you what Clarence, when we get there, I’ll ask the guy if he minds,” Ron laughed, “If he doesn’t answer, I’ll assume it’s ok.”

Ron, Gary and Clarence got a crew of men and semi and headed for Denver. When they arrived at the residence where they had found the gun collection, Ron walked over to the mummified remains and in a loud voice said, “Mister, do you mind if we borrow your gun cases?” He then turned to his friends and said, “It must be ok with him guys, he didn’t say a word.”

By removing the back bar from its tracks, they were able, barely, to move the cases out of the hidden gunroom. They hadn’t paid much attention the day before, but the glass in the doors was actually the same type of plastic that banks use as bulletproof glass. If they hadn’t thought to tow a forklift with them, they never would have been able to load the gun cases on the truck. While they were at it, they cleaned out his liquor supply and barware. It was well past noon when they returned to the *Long Branch*. The gun cases were lined up along one wall of the *Long Branch* and the three friends spent several days cleaning and replacing the firearms in their dedicated slots in the gun cases.

Ron had the desiccant blocks heated in an oven to restore them. The small oxygen absorber packs were replaced from stores with new ones. The cabinets were closed and the guns became a permanent display. All, that is, except for the Winchester model 70 rifles. Ron was holding the Winchester Model 70 Safari Express in .458 Winchester Magnum.

“What are you going to do with that, Ron?” Clarence asked.

"I'm going hunting!" Ron smiled.

"Crap Ron," Clarence exclaimed, "There ain't no elephants in Colorado! What are you going to hunt with that monster?"

"Squirrels," Ron answered.

"Are you out of your mind?" Gary asked. "If you could hit a squirrel with that 510 grain soft point bullet, there wouldn't be enough left to throw away! The cartridge develops over 2 tons (4,712 ft. lbs.) of energy."

"Nevertheless," Ron insisted.

Clarence and Gary grabbed their .22 long rifle 9422 Legacy Winchester carbines from their gun safes and joined Ron on the squirrel hunt. Ron didn't even bother to sight the weapon in. They moved to a wooded area about ½ mile west of the compound where there were several squirrel nests in the trees and sat and waited for a squirrel to make an appearance. Not long after, a squirrel ran along a branch and stopped to look around.

Ron took careful aim at the branch right below where the squirrel was sitting, took 3 deep breaths and let out half of the last breath. He gently squeezed the trigger on the cannon. He hit the branch right where he aimed, severing the branch. The squirrel, or what was left of it, was nowhere to be seen. Ron lay in a heap. When he was able to rise, he was holding his right arm close to his body.

Clarence and Gary didn't say a word. Gary picked up the model 70 and they headed back to the compound. Ron headed immediately to Fred's aid station and Clarence and Gary returned to the Long Branch. Clarence cleaned the rifle and placed it in the gun case. About an hour later, Ron showed up at the Long Branch. He showed his friends the massive bruise forming on his right shoulder.

"Geez, that monster kicks like a mule!" Ron finally said.

"No biggie Ron, it only has 104 ft. lbs. of recoil, give or take," Gary laughed.

"I fired one of those Barrett M-82's," Ron said, "Its recoil was nothing like that."

"Ron, the Barrett has an excellent recoil absorbing system," Clarence said, "All that model 70 had was a recoil pad."

It took Ron several days to recover from his experience and for the bruise to fade. By the time that he was well enough to make another trip to Denver to find another gun collection, he'd lost interest.

August 14, 2012, Long Branch, 1030 hours...

Clarence and Gary had been trying, without success, to persuade Ron to make another trip to Denver to look for additional gun collections since 0900.

“Dang it Ron,” Gary insisted, “If we had that kind of luck on our first trip, we’re bound to find more collections. You’re just pouting because you made a damned fool of yourself shooting that elephant gun. I say that we get in the truck and go! Besides, there are a couple of guns I’d like to find just to scratch an old itch.”

“Ok, ok, ok,” Ron caved in, “One more trip and that’s it. It’s too late today; let’s go in the morning. 6 am too early?”

August 15, 2012, The Ark, 0600...

They had a 5-ton truck towing a forklift, a Ma Deuce equipped Hummer and Ron’s pickup. They took enough supplies to allow them to spend up to 2 nights in Denver. Gary was looking for a Class III dealer. He wanted either a Suppressed Ruger or High Standard .22 pistol. If he could find one, he intended to set up an indoor range so that they could do a little target practice in the winter.

Ideally, he wanted a Ruger Mark II or a 22/45. That failing, he’d settle for a High Standard HDM. He had seen the Ruger in a Scottsdale Class III store many years before, circa 1992-3. At the time, the store wanted \$1,600 for the weapon and you had to be an Arizona resident to make the purchase. He still dreamed of owning the suppressed Mark II or a Hi Standard HDM.

It took them two days to find the Ruger handguns. The dealer had 3 blued models and 3 stainless models in stock, all suppressed Mark II’s. Gary considered himself most fortunate to find 1, let alone 6 of the weapons. On the way back to The Ark, he planned the indoor range in his mind. Despite it being late in the year, he persuaded Clarence to construct an underground range using the same tunnel building technique that had proved so effective. Chris fashioned a backstop with a sand tray for the 50’ range using the $\frac{3}{4}$ ” plating. They had several bricks of standard velocity .22 ammo in their supplies and Gary was looking forward to spending a lot of time at the range.

Labor Day, 2012, The Ark...

Construction of the underground range was well on the way. As soon as Chris finished welding the sloped backstop, Clarence would pour the remaining roof section and back fill the hole. Gary could hardly wait. Of course, they would have to take the day off for the celebration. By God, they’d better get the range done soon, winter was coming!

Gary and Sharon got married the first time in 1976. Divorcing after 21 years of marriage, they eventually remarried 2 years later. During the second marriage, there were no sur-

prises and they got along surprisingly well. Except when one of them wasn't feeling well. Then, it was all they could do to avoid a fight.

Gary had noticed over the years that the older couples were pretty successful at resolving their problems. The younger couples sometimes went at it and several of the older men and women would step in and help the young couple work through their problems. Being a role model wasn't necessarily enough. Sometimes the seniors had to get right down demanding with the younger couples to get them to put aside their personal feelings and look at the bigger picture.

Disputes arising between different family groups were resolved the same way. The group had long ago developed a system of mediation and binding arbitration to resolve disputes. The community could ill afford a Hatfield v. McCoy feud. Anyone not willing to abide by the system was invited to find another settlement. Usually, problems resolved themselves because 'time heals all wounds' (and wounds all heels).

Not one person in the community put themselves above another member of the community, especially during the early years. The Colorado Assembly had not seen fit to adopt any laws governing divorce. As a consequence, young couples were very, very selective when they chose a lifetime partner. It was literally a 'til death do us part' situation. And, murder was an automatic third offense, condemning the killer to instant retribution, e.g., the 'bullet' treatment.

No one wanted for anything in the community. Conviction of theft by the community carried the banishment provision. Besides, if someone really wanted something, all he or she had to do was ask and someone would help them make, find, or trade for the object of their desires. The Ark lived by the Ten Commandments. And the weak and morally corrupt applicants were prevented from joining the community.

The only trouble they'd ever had was with a family, from Texas, who wanted to join the community. During the interview, the man referred to 'Dang Yankees' more than once and was heard to use the expression, 'War of Northern Aggression'. Not wanting to revisit the 150-year-old conflict, someone had commented, "I guess that the war could have been avoided if the Yankees hadn't fired on Ft. Sumter and then kicked the Rebs' butts at First Manassas (First battle of Bull Run)."

The Texan, realizing that he was being put on, decided to drop the subject. The American Civil war had been a conflict that no one had really won, and people still argued to this day over the real reasons for the war. That's why, on the 4th of July, the colors of the CSA were always flown alongside the US and Colorado flags.

The US had abandoned all of its territories. American Samoa, Baker Island, Guam, Howland Island, Jarvis Island, Johnson Atoll, Kingman Reef, Midway Islands, Navassa Island, No. Mariana Islands, Palmyra Atoll, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands and Wake Island lost their status as US territories. Hawaii almost lost its statehood, but a last minute push by the Hawaiian delegation saved its status.

One new state was admitted to the Union, the state of Jefferson. Originally formed from the California Counties of Del Norte, Siskiyou, Modoc and Lassen, plus the Oregon County of Curry, the additional California Counties of Humboldt, Shasta, Trinity and Tehama and Oregon Counties of Josephine, Jackson, Klamath, Lake, Douglas and Coos were persuaded to join the revitalized Jefferson secessionist movement. Given the significant number of settlements in the 'Jefferson' Area, the independence movement prevailed and on July 4, 2012, Jefferson became the 51st state.

The Labor Day celebration was replete with the usual fare and a new treat was available this year, watermelon. Now if there was one thing that Clarence liked better than homemade ice cream and strawberries, it might just possibly be watermelon. Having stuffed himself with fried chicken, potato salad, coleslaw and veggies, he nevertheless found room for a slice of watermelon weighing about 4 pounds. Gary had found the watermelon seeds and Clarence was determined to show his appreciation by getting that range finished up within a week. Besides, he liked the kid. [Author's note: Clarence is 73, Ron is 71 and Gary is the kid at 69.]

The military contingent brought two steel stakes and a set of horseshoes to the picnic. All three of the old geezers gave it a shot. Only Clarence was able to come anywhere near the steel stake. Gary couldn't even pitch the horseshoe the 40' between the stakes. When Clarence threw two consecutive ringers, Gary threw down his shoes in disgust and headed for the *Long Branch* and a cold beer.

Long Branch Saloon, 1700 hours, Labor Day...

Gary sat nursing a cold mug of homebrewed beer. Clarence and Ron walked in, got a beer and sat down.

"What's the matter Gary?" Clarence asked, concerned at his friend's early departure from the picnic.

"Nothing really," Gary responded, "I just get so tired of not being able to keep up with you two old farts."

"Oh, is that all?" Ron laughed, "Hell, I thought it was something important."

Chapter Sixty-seven – Washington, DC

Clarence had the firing range completed within the week. Although the weather was still good enough that they could shoot outside, Gary was chomping at the bit to try the new range. So, almost before that paint on the walls had dried, he was down at the range, plinking with his new toys. It was amazing how quiet the weapons were. About all you could hear was the action cycling.

He finally managed to get Clarence and Ron down to the range and they, too were surprised at the weapons' performance. Gary gave them a choice, stainless or blued. They both took a stainless pistol, as did Gary. The blued models were relegated to the range and Gary asked the Mormon leather smiths to fashion shoulder holsters for the Mark II's. His rig was to be a double holster affair with a holster for the little bearcat on the right and a holster for the Mark II on the left. When the leather goods were ready, he delivered the new rigs to Clarence and Ron.

Long Branch Saloon, 0830, September 30, 2012...

"Winter is late coming this year," Clarence observed.

"If you mean no snow, you're right," Ron responded, "But it's getting pretty nippy out. It ought to start snowing any day now."

"Clarence, I can't begin to thank you enough for the indoor range," Gary grinned.

"Should have built it years ago," Clarence commented, "But, thank you, it was my pleasure. I never thanked you for finding the watermelon seeds, so we're even."

"I see that they finished cleaning up Washington, DC," Ron mentioned, "They are turning the entire city into a memorial. I doubt that the national government will ever move back there, too many bad memories. Either of you ever get to Washington before?"

"Never wanted to," Clarence answered.

"I always wanted to, but never made it," Gary answered.

"They say that Washington used to be something to see in the springtime with all of the Cherry trees blossoming," Ron continued. "I'd like to see it now, since the cleanup."

"We could take the train," Gary suggested.

"Or, I could talk to General Jamison and see if the wives and us could catch a hop on a military aircraft," Ron countered.

"You mean for this coming spring?" Clarence asked.

“No, I mean for next week,” Ron replied.

“Let’s do it,” Gary said.

“Fine by me,” Clarence responded.

Ron called General Jamison and asked about the possibility of the three men and their wives visiting Washington, DC. Jamison pointed out that they didn’t need his permission and wanted to know what Ron really wanted. Ron explained that the three of them and their wives wanted to visit Washington, DC next week if the General could possibly find them space on an eastbound military flight.

The General was scheduled to leave for Philadelphia in two days. There was plenty of room aboard the C-20G Gulfstream IV and he would, he said, ‘be happy to have company on the flight’.

October 2, 2012, Philadelphia, PA, 1600 local...

Washington, DC wasn’t open to the public quite yet, so General Jamison arranged for an aide to escort the 3 families to Washington and be their tour guide. Having never seen the city, except in photos and on TV, they had no idea what to expect. They had visions of a vast ruin, buildings toppled and crushed; sort of like the pictures of Hiroshima after the A-bomb had been dropped.

They were shocked to see not a destroyed city, but rather a city that had seen better times. The White house was gone, the 1 kiloton yield of the nuclear weapon having done its worst. The Washington Monument was damaged, but not destroyed and workmen were busy replacing the upper portion of the monument. In fact, much of Washington, DC had been spared major damage by the low yield weapon. A small CCC taskforce worked diligently to repair the damage to the city in preparation of opening the city to tourism in the coming spring. They visited all of the memorials, Congress, the Smithsonian campus saving the Wall for last.

On the last day of their visit, they went to the Wall and Gary located the name of his cousin, David Lee Meyer and that of his boyhood friend ‘Paulie’, Paul George Hamilton III. David had been killed when he was being extracted after a weeklong 2 man LRRP operation. The other soldier had climbed the ladder to the Huey first and David had followed. When David was up the ladder a ways, Charlie opened fire on the Huey and the pilot had tried to lift the bird above the enemy.

One strand, or so Gary had heard, of the ladder broke, swinging David into a tree, crushing his head. David hung on and the ladder was pulled into the chopper. They flew straight to an offshore hospital ship, but David’s injuries were too severe and he died 3 days later.

‘Paulie’ had volunteered for the Army in 1967. Gary couldn’t remember if he was in the

82nd or 101st. Anyway during his third week in Vietnam early in 1968, still in orientation camp awaiting assignment, the camp came under mortar fire; the first mortar round struck Paul's tent killing the occupants outright. They couldn't even open the casket at the funeral. Their visit to the old capital ended on that somber note. The Aide escorted them back to Philadelphia and they had two days free to visit the city before General Jamison was ready to return to Ft. Carson.

Gary, having spent time in Philadelphia for the 2nd Continental Congress and Constitutional Convention, acted as their guide. They toured the Independence National Historical Park area. They visited Independence Hall, saw the Liberty Bell and the origins of the United States. Ron started kidding Gary about the 2nd Continental Congress.

"Funny, Gary, you don't look old enough to have attended the 2nd Continental Congress," he quipped pointing to a sign. The sign read:

"Constructed between 1732 and 1756 as the State House of the Province of Pennsylvania, it is considered a fine example of Georgian architecture. From 1775 to 1783 (except for the winter of 1777 - 1778 when Philadelphia was occupied by the British Army) this was the meeting place for the Second Continental Congress. It was in the Assembly Room of this building that George Washington was appointed commander in chief of the Continental Army in 1775 and the Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776. In the same room the design of the American flag was agreed upon in 1777, the Articles of Confederation were adopted in 1781, and the US Constitution was drafted in 1787. The building, inside and out, has been restored whenever possible to its original late-18th century appearance. Most of the furnishings are period pieces. The 'rising sun' chair used by George Washington as he presided over the Constitutional Convention is original."

"Actually," Gary said, "We came to view the entire gathering as the 2nd Constitutional Convention. I guess, technically, we were the 3rd Continental Congress, not the 2nd."

"That's alright partner," Ron said, "All that matters is the results you folks achieved in righting 200 years of wrongs by the government."

The following day, General Jamison was ready to return to Ft. Carson and they were eager to get home. While the General had his head buried in paperwork, the wives visited. The three men were strangely quiet, each apparently lost in his thoughts. Gary, shaken by his visit to the Wall, tried to remember David and Paul, but it had been too many years.

Ron sat thinking about how Washington had avoided the near total destruction he had always envisioned. One tiny bomb, destroying only the White House and some nearby buildings had poisoned a city with its deadly radiation. Had they only a clue of the pending attack, most of Congress would have survived. On the other hand, maybe it wasn't such a bad deal that they didn't have a clue, it gave the country a clean slate to start afresh from.

“My God,” Ron thought, “What if Kerry had become President? Or worse, what if George had been re-elected and Hillary had been elected in 2008? That old white haired drunk from the state of Massachusetts had too much influence back in 2004. What would the country have been like with one of his buddies in the White House? It’s been over 8 years since that bomb went off! Where has the time gone?”

Contrary to Gary and Ron, Clarence was thinking not of the past, but of the future. When *The Ark* had been built with its single ring of 10 homes, the Common building was ideal. Now that they had 88 homes, a Youth Center/Long Branch Saloon, 2 warehouses and a Garage, many of the functions formerly associated with the Common Building had been moved to other locations. Nevertheless, the Common building, Central, was too small for the group. “Perhaps,” he thought, “We should demolish the building and convert the area into a small park. We could build a building more appropriate to our needs outside the ring of homes. We could surely recycle most of the stone used to construct the original Common Building. I’ll have to bring that up at the next Town Hall Meeting.”

November 1, 2012, 1900 hours, main room...

In their absence, the weather had warmed slightly. It was the first of November and the ground wasn’t even frozen hard yet. They’d only had a skiff of snowfall at *The Ark* while the men and their wives were in Washington.

Don brought the *Homeowners Association*, e.g., Town Hall Meeting to order. There was no old business to discuss. When he asked if there were any new business, Clarence raised his hand.

“Go ahead Clarence,” Don said, “What’s on your mind?”

Clarence looked around the packed room. “Look around folks,” he said, “We’re packed in here like sardines. I got to thinking that it’s time for us to move on. When we had 10 homes, then jumped up 18 more homes and 24 trailers, we started to get cramped. When we added the extra 12 mobile homes, it got really bad. Now, we have 88 homes in 4 rings and this building is just too small.

“I think that come spring, we should tear down this building and build a new Community Center, large enough to handle everyone from *The Ark 1* and *The Ark 2*. We have that large area where we had our dry lot before the livestock was moved to the north farm. I feel that it would be a perfect area for a new Community Center. Let’s face it; the only way we’ve been able to get along with this building for so long is that we moved functions from this building to other buildings. Anyway, what do you folks think?”

There were a lot of questions. How big should the new building be? Should it be a one-story or a two-story building? Were they going to build a separate building for Herb’s re-loading operation or move it to the new Community Center? What about all of the generators and electrical controls in the present building, were they going to move to the

new Community Center or to a building of their own? Good questions all.

“First of all, the present building is 60’ by 160’ or 9,600 square feet,” Clarence replied, “I think that the new building should be at least 100’ by 200’ or 20,000 square feet. We can either build separate buildings for the generators or put in a basement; personally, I’d prefer to add a basement. That would give us 40,000 square feet under one roof.

“However, it also makes sense to build a second story. That will present a bit of a challenge, we’ll have to locate steel beams to support both the first and second floors. But, we’ve never failed to find what we needed before, so we’ll just do it again. Anyway, that would give us 60,000 square feet under one roof. Herb’s reloading operation should be moved over to the industrial area on the south farm. It’s grown to the point where it should be out of the residential area entirely. If we cover the entire roof of the new building with electric shingles, it will support the electrical requirements of the building.”

“We can put a gymnasium on the main floor and use it as our community meeting room. The second floor can be divided into the various office areas we need like communications, security and the like,” Clarence continued. “Anyone who would like to be considered for a space assignment on the second floor should submit a brief outline of how much space they want and what it is needed for. If the proposal for the new building is adopted, we’ll try to accommodate as many requests as we can. However, I believe that some portion of the second floor space should be reserved for future expansion. I guess that’s about it, Don.”

“Do we need to discuss this some more, or, are we ready to vote of the proposal?” Don asked.

A few more questions were raised and answered. Yes, the Sheriff’s Department would probably relocate to the new Community Building. Yes, they could include a large kitchen area in the building to handle events. No, the Youth Center wouldn’t be moved into the new building, it was perfectly satisfactory where it was. Yes, the Food Building might be moved to the Industrial area on the south farm, but that was a separate issue entirely.

The measure passed with an 85% favorable vote. Clarence, though not an architect, would draw up the plans for the new building; he had his work cut out for him and something to occupy his entire winter.

The person who had brought up the question about the Food Building brought it up as a separate issue. Yes, the Food building was frightfully small for their needs because it combined the butchering operation, the meat cutting operation, bakery, freezers and the herb garden.

A prefabricated steel building could be erected in the industrial area to house the butchering and meat cutting operations, the bakery and freezers could occupy the existing food building and a greenhouse would be built for the herb garden. The tunnel system

would be expanded to include the new Community Center, Reloading shop, Meat Processing Building and the Greenhouse. Why not, someone suggested, build a larger greenhouse and start all of the garden plants in the greenhouse?

The next day, a couple of people were sent to Pueblo to measure a greenhouse that would be dismantled and moved to The Ark. Herb told Clarence how large a building he needed for his operation and the butchers/meat cutters did the same. Since they were having an 'Indian Summer', Clarence directed that the grading be started immediately for those three buildings.

If the unseasonably warm weather (above freezing) held for a few days, they might even get the foundations and slabs in before winter came. They rushed to grade for the slabs and dig the foundations. Other crews dug the trenches for the utility lines. They beat the weather by 3 days. The prefabricated buildings were a snap to erect. The greenhouse was double labor due to the dismantling and reassembly process and doubly so because they were dealing with glass. They had even managed to haul a couple of dozen dump truck loads of rock for the new Community Center.

Thanksgiving Day, 2012...

They had a lot to be thankful this year, a late winter, spring construction jump-started, a new gun collection and shooting range, a major construction project completed, a new and improved septic system was in place, increased electrical generation capacity, a new banking system functioning well, a new Internet that the late Al Gore hadn't invented and a bumper crop.

The silos were full, their herds had grown huge and they were supplying all of the meat required at Ft. Carson. They were producing in excess of 1,200 hogs a year from their 60-sow confinement system. They shipped milk and cheese to Ft. Carson. Another year and their beef herd would be so large that they would have to consider either culling heifers from the herd or find additional outlets for their meat.

It was an old fashioned Thanksgiving with turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, candied sweet potatoes, fruit salads of all descriptions, perhaps, at least for the older people, the best Thanksgiving celebration in years. After the feast, Ron, Gary and Clarence walked over to the *Long Branch*, maybe a cup of Irish coffee would go down good, Ron had suggested.

"Clarence, it looks like you have a full winter ahead of you," Gary commented.

"Sure do, fellas," Clarence replied, "What do the two of you have planned?"

"Partner," Ron answered, "I've got the responsibility of taking care of this gun collection, Brenda and Paula are expecting and I'll have a couple of new grandchildren to spoil; I don't know where I'm going to find enough free time."

"I have my new firing range to use and I was thinking about writing a book about our adventures," Gary smiled.

"Who would read that?" Ron asked.

"Do you remember that Frugal Squirrel website that you used to go to back when we had an Internet?" Gary asked.

"Sure do," Ron replied, "Why?"

"It seems that about 98 percent of that group were prepared and survived the past 8 years," Gary responded, "The website is back up on the Mil-Net. I think I'll write the story and put it in their Patriot Fiction section."

"Given the way you're given to stretching the truth," Ron ribbed his friend, "You sure couldn't put it in any other section."

Chapter Sixty-eight – A New Name?

The winter of 2012 – 2013 passed quickly, southern Colorado receiving a normal, or perhaps even a lighter than normal snowfall. Clarence was swamped with work. Not being an architect, his plans for the new Community Center were perhaps a bit crude, but any carpenter could build the building from them. They wouldn't need his help erecting the steel buildings over on the south farm anyway; they were really becoming good at erecting those steel buildings. After a mild winter, the thaw came early, almost too early; Clarence barely had his plans finished.

The construction crews set about erecting the steel buildings as soon as the weather permitted. By the time the greenhouse was dismantled and shipped back to *The Ark*, The new Meat Processing Facility and Herb's reloading shop were erected and the equipment moved and set up.

The slaughter operation (butchers) could handle up to 30 cattle or 60 hogs per day. The beef destined for the Army was shipped in an old refrigerated truck as hanging quarters. The hogs were cut down to primal cuts and boxed, e.g., loins, shoulders, and Boston Butts. The small smoke house where they had been curing their ham and bacon was replaced entirely with a new, larger smokehouse in the time between when they finished erecting the steel buildings and began erecting the greenhouse.

The greenhouse was erected quickly because so many people were free to work on it. The ladies had all planted trays of seeds and grown them in their kitchens until the greenhouse was complete. When it was done and heated, all of the little seedlings were transferred from the kitchens to the greenhouse. It would be a few weeks before the garden could go in and they would have legitimate plants to start the garden instead seeds.

By the first of May 2013, The Ladies Guild was busy planting the garden. One crew was throwing together the tunnels to connect the new buildings and the basement for the new Community Center was being dug. The hole was simply too big to dig with back-hoes and they had 'borrowed' some construction equipment from a defunct Pueblo Contractor.

The Community Center construction project...

The basement, Clarence had decided, should be 16' deep. The earth was removed and the foundations dug and poured from concrete. They then poured a concrete floor for the entire 20,000 square foot basement. While the concrete was curing, they began the tunnel to connect the new building to the rest of the tunnel system. The support pillars were made of rebar and concrete and as soon as the 16' basement walls were erected using the stone that had been hauled in, the generators and their control system were moved to the basement and installed.

Crews had been in Pueblo and had collected the equipment from a laundry/dry cleaning

operation; this, too was installed in the basement. A wood-burning furnace was also located and installed. The steel I beams were set in place and the slip form construction of the walls continued. The first floor was to have a 12' ceiling and the second floor a 10' ceiling. When the tunnel crews finished constructing the doublewide tunnel, they began demolition of the old Common Building. The roof had been removed in 4'x8' sections and lay carefully stacked. All of the building timbers were removed with care for recycling. Its stone walls were battered apart and stone hauled to the site of the new construction.

June 17, 2013...

It was raining and construction was halted until the rain passed. Ron, Clarence and Gary were sitting in the *Long Branch* visiting.

"Those are sure cute new grandbabies," Clarence told Ron.

"Thanks Clarence," Ron proudly acknowledged. "With Fred promoting natural childbirth, and training midwives, this baby boom isn't a big concern."

"Is the hospital going in on the second floor?" Gary asked.

"Yes," Clarence acknowledged. "Those 10,000 square feet of extra space will allow us to upgrade our medical facility slightly, too. We're going to put in an operating suite and two 4 bed wards plus some examining rooms."

"Whoa," Ron replied, "Where are you getting that equipment?"

"From an out-patient surgical center in Colorado Springs," Clarence replied. "We located a bunch of equipment just sitting collecting dust. So, we trucked it down here and will install it on the second floor. Even found an old X-ray to install. I'll have to find some shielding for the X-ray room, but I'll manage. Oh, we also cleaned out a Dentist's office and are putting in a one chair dental office."

"Wow!" Gary exclaimed. "No more trips to Ft. Carson for dental work?"

"Nope," Clarence smiled, "A dentist and two dental assistants will drive down here one day a week, weather permitting, and provide dental care. Should we have a surgical emergency, the Army will put a surgical team on a chopper and fly them down here. It's not that far by chopper and by the time Fred and the nurses get the patient prepared for surgery, the surgical team will be here."

"Why two wards and not one big ward?" Gary asked.

"Fred said that we had to have one ward for infectious patients and the other for non-infectious patients; you know, isolate any contagion," Clarence explained. "There's another thing, too. With the Army and Air Force merged into a combined force, their prima-

ry mission has changed. They are assigning trained medical corpsmen to each settlement with plenty of supplies, so no one will go wanting for medical treatment.”

“That would have made Teddy and Hillary happy,” Ron laughed, “A national medical program at last.”

“Did you guys see what they brought in on the trucks yesterday?” Clarence asked.

“No,” Ron and Gary answered.

They were looking for kitchen equipment for the Community Center and found a couple of walk-in freezers and several walk-in coolers. We will put a walk-in cooler in the Community Center, but we’re going to have to knock out a section of the wall at the old Food Building to get the others into the building.”

“What are you going to do with those 21 cu. ft. freezers in the food building?” Ron asked.

“Probably just leave them where they are,” Clarence replied. “We’re going to put up an insulated wall separating the bakery from the freezer section, though.”

“How much longer do you think the Community Building is going to take to complete?” Gary asked.

“Well,” Clarence responded, “The basement is done and all setup and operating; the first floor is in and 3 of the 4 first floor walls are erected. As soon as the rain stops, we’ll move in the walk-in cooler and kitchen equipment and finish the 4th wall. I really wanted a gymnasium on the main floor, but the support posts precluded that.”

“I’d say,” Clarence continued, “Then we’ll have the first floor wrapped up ready to use by the end of the month.”

“Are you still using the stone wall plus foam plus insulation construction?” Gary asked.

“You know it,” Clarence smiled. “And two sets of triple glazed windows for each window opening, spaced 9” apart. We’re using the E glass stuff with the argon gas so the windows will have an extremely high R-value. Chris is also fashioning the 1” plate shutters for the windows and doors.”

“Do you really think we still need to continue that type of security?” Ron asked.

“Probably not,” Clarence answered, “But if the time ever came that we needed it, it would be too late then. We’ve always used the ounce of prevention theory and we won’t be changing that now.”

Noticing that the rain had stopped, Clarence said, “Guess I’d better get back at it fellas.

There's still plenty of time today to get all of the kitchen equipment off the trucks and into the building. We'll start on the last first floor wall tomorrow. See you all later."

Clarence returned to the new Community Center and supervised the unloading of the kitchen equipment. Ron and Gary decided that with the sky clearing rapidly that it might be a good day for a horseback ride. They got their usual equipment, the shoulder holsters, the hog legs and their carbines and drove to the north farm. They wore fanny packs; their saddlebags contained BOB's. They saddled up and decided to tour *The Ark 1* compound by horseback. The far north and far south sections were croplands and of little interest; so, they rode toward the Industrial area on the south farm.

As they rode, they visited. "You never told me what you named your mare, Gary," Ron said.

"I thought long and hard about that, Ron," Gary said. "I thought about all kinds of fancy names, but when I got to thinking about all the problems I've had with horses, it finally came to me. This is a fine spirited mare, but she treats me with the love and respect I believe I deserve. Besides, I wanted to sort of get one up on the world. So, I named her Salina."

By the time the two had reached the old food building, workmen were busy removing one section of panels from the pole building. The trailer containing the two walk-in freezers and walk-in coolers was parked nearby.

"Doesn't look like they will have room to put all of those walk-in coolers in the food building," Gary commented to Ron.

"You know, I'd have to agree with you," Ron said as they rode on. When they arrived at the Industrial Park on the south farm, they noticed workmen removing sections from the wall of the new meat processing facility.

"I'll give you one guess what they're going to do with the extra walk-in coolers," Ron said.

Gary laughed. They rode over to Herb's new reloading shop and tied their horses to the hitching rail erected by the building. Herb had hooked up with various manufacturers of powder, bullets and primers and now had a permanent contract with the Army to reload practice ammo for several military Forts. He had even been able to purchase a second used Dillon Super 1050 reloading press. He had quite the operation and employed several people to operate the machines, cleaning the used brass and packaging the finished ammo.

They stayed for a while visiting with Herb, and had a cup of coffee. They walked from Herb's shop to the Garage. The Sno-Cats were parked outside and Chris and Matt and three other people, 2 women and a man, were occupied working on rebuilding diesel engines. Chris waved to them but didn't stop what he was working on. They noticed 30

market-ready steers being herded into the corral behind the meat processing plant. Deciding that they'd had enough sightseeing, they rode over to the *Long Branch* and tied their horses to the hitching rail that had been erected there.

They grabbed a short beer, played a game of pool and returned to their horses. When they arrived back at the north farm, two of the farm hands took their horses from them and they got back into the truck and returned to the *Long Branch*.

"I can't believe the size of this operation," Ron said to Gary, adding Sweet and Low to his coffee. "Somehow the name, *The Ark* doesn't seem to fit the place anymore."

"What are you suggesting?" Gary asked.

"Oh I don't know," Ron replied, "It just seems like we ought to give this city we built a better name."

"I like *The Ark*, just fine," Gary replied. "It really symbolizes what we have here. Just like Noah, it provided us with shelter from 'the storm'. Don't you remember what God told Noah after the flood?"

"Can't say as I do partner," Ron replied.

"He said," Gary continued, *As long as the earth endures, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease. "God also demanded an accounting from each man for the life of his fellow man," "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man."*

"Where's that in the Bible?" Ron asked.

"The first book of Genesis," Gary replied. This community has been, is and will continue to be our *Ark* against the flood. Our society now lives by the accounting that God demands of man. I, for one, will resist any attempt anyone makes to change the name of this community.

"Stop and think about these past 9 years Ron. Whenever we needed something, it was provided. We only killed those who would kill us. I ask you, was it just dumb luck that we always came up with the extra toilet paper and coffee and electric shingles and, well you get the idea, don't you?"

"I sure do partner," Ron admitted.

"We've always insisted that only hard working people with a sense of morality and decent God fearing values were fit candidates for this community," Gary continued. "Maybe the bombs back in 2004 and the SARS pandemic that followed were the modern equivalent of the Biblical Flood. I'm neither a Philosopher nor a Theologian, but the comparison strikes me as just too close for comfort. Our settlement and most of the

others are governed by the precepts of the Ten Commandments.”

“Ever think about being a preacher?” Ron laughed.

“No, but I was a deacon in a church for a month once,” Gary laughed back.

Chapter Sixty-nine – Doctors

True to his word, Clarence had the west wall of the first floor erected, the I-beams installed and the slab for the second floor poured by the end of June. While a crew of carpenters framed the inside of the first floor, sprayed the foam insulation and routed the wiring, the masonry crew continued to raise the walls. They were up to the bottom of the second floor window wells by July 3rd.

July 4th, 2013...

This year General Jamison's troops arrived early and pitched tents.

"Good morning General," Don greeted John, "What's with all of the tents?"

"I brought along a few companies of Army Engineers this year Don," John answered, "Heard you were building a huge Community Center and thought you could use the help."

"We can always use help," Don replied, "But it's really not necessary."

"Radar shows a major Pacific storm coming that should hit our area in about 10 days unless it stalls. With these Engineers to help, we can get the second floor walls up, the roof trusses in place and the sheeting on before the storm hits," Jamison replied.

"That would be nice," Don said, "We're grateful."

"No more than we are," John responded, "You people supply us with meat, eggs, milk, cheese and ammo."

"That's just business," Don replied, "And we're grateful for the business."

"I understand that well enough Don," Jamison said, "But there is no one who is willing to give us the prices you do. Regardless, we've had a great working relationship for years and I want to see it continue. Another thing, we had two people who were talking about retirement decide that they wanted to stay in. This has created a problem for me and I'm hoping that you can help out."

"Oh?" Don asked, "What's that all about?"

One of our surgeons, a Bird Colonel named Moore," Jamison continued, "Has his 30 years in and decided to retire. He and his best friend, a Lt. Colonel dentist named Roberts were planning to retire at the same time and settle down in a community and practice part time.

"A lot of skilled medical people end up in the military these days. Anyway, their replacements have already arrived. The two doctors have requested that their retirement

papers be withdrawn because they haven't found a community they want to live in."

"I see," Don said, a gleam in his eye, "So what the doctor's need is a community to live in that they'd be comfortable with and so forth?"

"Exactly," Jamison replied. "I brought them and their families along with us today, would you like to meet them?"

"By all means General," Don replied.

The two Colonels and their wives were sitting visiting with Ron, Gary, Clarence, Linda, Sharon and Lucy. The Colonels had just been explaining their retirement woes to the three old geezers, who had, as they listened, been exchanging knowing looks. Although everyone was in civilian attire, the two Colonels quickly rose when Don and the General approached.

"Don," Jamison said, "I like you to meet Colonel Robert Moore and his wife Loretta and Lt. Colonel James Roberts and his wife Marion."

Turning to the Colonels, Jamison said, "This is Don Constantine, former Sheriff of Pueblo County and the leader of the community. And in case you two don't know it, those three senior gentlemen sitting there and their wives are six of the ten founders of this community."

Pointing towards Fred and Jan, General Jamison said, "Those folks are the Wilson's. Fred is in charge of the medical unit here. He was a Seattle paramedic and later an LA paramedic. Although he never got the chance to take the test, I understand that he's completed all of the course work to become a Physician's Assistant.

"That couple over there," he said pointing to Chris and Patti, "Are the Peoples. Chris is something of a legendary mechanic and can repair anything. Jan and Patti, their wives are now homemakers. The women of this community have formed a Ladies Guild and are heavily involved in teaching their many skills to the next generation. They also collaborate and provide home schooling for the children."

"Would you folks like to take a tour of our community?" Don asked.

"Oh may we?" Loretta Moore asked.

Don and the two couples got into the General's sedan and he drove them around The Ark, showing them the industrial area, the farming operation and finally gave them a tour of one of the new, unoccupied homes in the outer ring of homes. The officers were surprised at the scale of the operation; but the wives simply fell in love with the simple, efficient homes. They returned to the picnic and rejoined the General and the five founding couples.

“What did you think of our little community,” Clarence asked.

“Quite the operation,” Col. Moore said.

“Oh the houses are so nice,” Marion Roberts added.

“What’s that building you have going up over there?” Col. Moore asked.

“That’s our new Community Building,” Ron replied. “Clarence, you can explain it better than I, tell the Doctors what we have planned for the second floor.”

“The second floor will house our security office, communications center, a dental office and a two ward hospital.” Clarence explained. “Some of the deputies’ wives are nurses and Fred is our ‘doctor’. We have an arrangement worked out with General Jamison to have weekly visits from a Dentist and a Surgical Team can be brought in by chopper in around thirty minutes, should the need arise. Of course...it would be better if we had our own Doctor and Dentist, but we’ve never found anyone who was available or interested.”

“Oh really?” the Colonels spoke in unison.

“What are you offering your potential candidates, if I might ask?” Col. Moore asked.

“The way this community works, people don’t get paid for doing their regular job,” Clarence responded, “Maybe one of the best examples is Gary’s cousin John. He was a retired farmer and hadn’t yet sold off his farm equipment. He donated the equipment to the community and oversees the farming operation here at *The Ark 1*. He and his wife Barb received a new home, ‘shop’ at the community ‘store’ where everything is free and have a good life. The money they got from selling their home, etc. was theirs to keep.”

“So far as a doctor goes,” Gary picked up while Clarence caught his breath, “We are offering a new home and the same ‘shopping’ privileges. Any income the doctor earned outside of his community practice would be his to keep. However, you’d probably find that to be an insignificant source of income.”

“When are your new facilities going to be ready?” Col. Roberts asked.

“Sooner than we planned,” Don interrupted, “General Jamison brought several companies of Engineers so that we can get the building closed up before a big storm that’s supposed to hit in about 10 days.”

“That’s news to me, Don,” Clarence said.

“I hadn’t had a chance to tell you yet Clarence,” Don smiled.

The picnic went on as planned and Clarence got the chance to eat both watermelon and

strawberries and ice cream. After the meal, three farm hands brought the old geezers their horses and they solemnly led the parade into the now annual rodeo. Not being much of rodeo fans, the three quietly slipped off to the *Long Branch*. They were sitting there drinking lemonade when the two doctors and their wives entered the Saloon.

“Hi fellas,” Col Moore greeted them, “Mind if we join you?”

“Grab a seat,” Ron said (his fingers crossed behind his back), “What can we do for you?”

“This is quite some community you folks have put together,” Moore continued, “What does one do to apply for admission?”

(Gotcha, Ron thought) “Well Colonel, it’s just like anything else, you ask. Then, you’re interviewed by a committee and if your philosophies match with those of the community and you have something to offer the community, the community votes on admittance.”

“Oh,” Moore said, disappointment in his voice, “It’s that complicated, huh?”

“Put yourself in the place of a resident for a moment Doc,” Ron continued, “Here you’ve invested everything you have in a community, perhaps for several years. You wouldn’t want just any Tom, Dick or Harry moving in unless you were satisfied that they would fit in, now would you?”

“We have a committee that screens each applicant family and makes a recommendation to the membership about potential new members. The members then vote on the new family. They have always accepted the recommendations of the selection committee.”

“And how does one apply?” Moore continued, “Lots of paperwork and such?”

“No, they just ask and the committee sets up the interview,” Ron continued.

“I see,” Moore said. “We have been visiting among ourselves and with the General. We, that is to say both of our families, would like to apply for membership. When do you think we might be able to meet with the membership committee?”

“You have already met all of them over the course of the day,” Ron replied.

“Really?” Moore asked.

“Yep, your interview began the minute that we met you this morning,” Ron smiled, “When are you folks moving in?”

There were squeals of delight from the Colonels’ wives. The Colonels were positively beaming.

“Oh there’s one thing I forgot to mention Doctors,” Ron said in a half stern voice, “We don’t have any dang golf course in this community.”

“That’s ok,” Moore replied, “There’s a course up at the Fort.”

With the extra manpower provided by the Army Engineers, the Community Center was finished in 8 days. At the suggestion of one of the Engineers, the pitch of the roof was increased from 45 degrees to 52.5 degrees. The Engineer told Clarence that a big as the roof was the snow might not slide off with a 1:1 pitch. The Army stayed on after the building was sealed up and helped erect all of the interior walls on the second floor. The General, relieved to have solved his problem (was there ever any doubt?), supplied some extra equipment for the hospital including a couple of incubators, and some anesthesiology equipment. The retired Colonels and their families moved into their new homes the last day of August.

Chapter Seventy – School Time

With the Community Center finished sooner than planned, Clarence was left with nothing to do. He had anticipated that it would take until Labor Day to finish the new Community Center. After it was finished, he had planned to grade the area formerly occupied by the old Common building and plant grass seed.

Then, next spring, he had planned to recover some playground equipment from Pueblo parks and schools and create a park/playground area in the vacant space. He happened to mention his plans to an officer in charge of one of the Engineer companies and before he knew it, the Engineers had graded the space, recovered and installed the playground equipment, laid sod over the entire area, and had built picnic tables using their own materials.

September 1, 2013, 1900 hours, Community Center...

Don called the meeting to order and introduced the two new families. With no disrespect intended to Fred, the residents were nevertheless happy to have both a surgeon and a dentist as members of their community. A trip to Pueblo had produced enough seating for several hundred people and enough folding tables to seat the members of both *The Ark 1 and 2* for a sit down meal.

Don asked Clarence to describe the features of the new facility to the residents who hadn't had a chance to observe its construction.

"As you know," Clarence began, "We have a full basement which contains our electrical generators and control center; we recovered and installed a laundry/dry cleaner establishment which included a large sheet iron, I don't know how else to describe it, that is used to iron sheets for motels, hospitals and the like. We are presently only using about half of the floor space in the basement and are using the remaining space for storage for things like these chairs and the folding tables. We put in a large, hand operated freight elevator to allow us to move things more easily."

"The main floor here has this main room and a kitchen," Clarence continued, "The kitchen has a walk-in cooler, three 8-burner gas stoves with double ovens, deep fat fryers, and a large preparation area. In addition, we installed a bank of 4 large ovens and several of the industrial sized stew pots. We can probably make enough Chili to feed the entire population at one time."

"The second floor," Clarence went on, "Contains the security office, the old radio shack which has been renamed the communications center, a 2 ward, 8 bed hospital with two examination rooms, a surgical suite, X-ray room, a small nurses' station and an office for our Doctor.

"There is also a one chair dental office complete with dental X-ray and all of the most modern equipment. Oh, I almost forgot, General Jamison supplied us with two incuba-

tors so we are going to add a small nursery to the hospital. We also moved the Library to the second floor and added hundreds of books from our scavenging.

“The remainder of the space on the second floor is reserved for future expansion. For example, the Ladies Guild has asked us to set up a sewing center where they can get together to work on quilts and the like. Ladies, you will be pleased to know that your room will be ready later this week.”

“One of the Army Engineers,” he continued, “Suggested that our 12:12 roof pitch might not be steep enough to guarantee the snow sliding off because of the friction caused by the electric shingles. So, we increased the pitch to a 13” rise per horizontal foot. There ain’t no way any snow is going to stick to THAT roof!

“Anyway, we had a huge attic, nearly 20,000 square feet of bonus space. So, we put the insulation in the roof joists and created, in effect, a third floor. This area is our new media center. There is a huge room with lots of seating to view movies and the like. Some of the equipment we salvaged during our salvage operations included a media center computer, projector and auxiliary equipment. We used that equipment to create a theatre. We also hit the video stores in Pueblo and Colorado Springs and brought in a couple of truckloads of videos and DVD’s. We’ll never HAVE TO watch the same movie again.”

Pausing to catch his breath, Clarence continued, “We also built several smaller video viewing/TV rooms that will seat up to 15 people in case you don’t want to watch the feature presentation. Now that they’ve restored PBS, you have two channels to watch, PBS or the Armed Forces Network. Finally, we put in several audio rooms for those folks who want to listen to some music and don’t have their own equipment. I guess that about sums it up, folks. Darn longest winded speech I ever made.”

When the applause died down, Don said, “We’d also like to thank Clarence and the Army Corp of Engineers for the park and playground area in the center of our housing rectangle.”

This remark generated another round of applause that couldn’t end soon enough to suit Clarence.

“Is it fair to assume that you have no more building projects in the works, Clarence?” Don kidded.

“Now that you mention it Don,” Clarence said, “I’ve been thinking that that machine shed ought to be moved to the north farm. Also, Since the Bakery and the Youth Center are both of pole building construction, I was thinking that we should move the bakery over to the Industrial area and put it in a steel building. We can build a larger Youth Center and separate *Long Branch Saloon* using the slip form method of construction. If I’m going to leave a legacy to *The Ark* when I pass on in 100 years or so, I’d like it to be that we built so very, very well. And, one final thing; excluding the tunnel between *The Ark 1* and *The*

Ark 2, I'd like to replace any of the narrow tunnels with double wide tunnels."

"You might just have to live another 100 years, Clarence, to get all of that done," Don said, teasing the master carpenter.

"Well, if there's no other business, refreshments are on the tables along the walls," Don concluded. "Get yourself a donut and coffee and feel free to tour the facility. Meeting adjourned."

The ten original founders quietly slipped out of the Community Center and made their way to the *Long Branch*. No longer a hideaway for the men, the Saloon had become more of a social club with the women often gathering to have coffee or tea and visit.

"Dang it Clarence," Ron said, "Aren't you ever going to slow down?"

"There will be plenty of time to sleep when I'm dead in a hundred years or so," Clarence laughed. "To be honest, I'm almost afraid to slow down. I can't do the physical things that I could do 50 or even 25 years ago, but I have to stay busy. By the way, what did you think of my suggestions for next year's construction projects?"

"Sounds like a lot of work to me," Gary offered.

"Ah Gary, did you see how fast we put up what amounts to a 4 story building?" Clarence asked.

"Yes...but," Gary began to object.

"BUT WHAT?" Clarence mocked anger. "This little facility is really nice, little being the operative word. Between adding that gun collection and the pool table, we've lost a lot of sitting room. Besides, I'd like to have a kitchen at the Long Branch Saloon; maybe serve meals on the weekends or something. We have young people growing up who would probably jump at the chance to earn a little tip money and the kitchen could be a cooking school."

"Speaking of school," Jan entered the conversation, "What would you fellas think of setting up school classes in the Community Center? It's about time we had a formal school."

"What did you have in mind Jan," Ron asked.

"There are several options Ron," Jan replied. "There is probably enough space on the second floor to handle all of the kids with space left over. Or, you could partition off parts of the main floor into classrooms."

"How many classrooms were you thinking of Jan?" Clarence asked.

"Maybe four," she replied, "One for K-3, one for 4-6, one for 7-9 and a fourth for 10-12. That would keep the class sizes small and keep the kids in groups of about their own ages. We could cover a lot of ground just having 4 hours of class a day. We could have 12 weeks on and one week off, effectively dividing the year into 4 full school quarters. I think that we could develop a curriculum for each quarter and let the kids work at their own pace. When a student successfully completed the work for the quarter, he or she would be excused until the next quarter began."

"Jan?" Gary asked, "Were you thinking of the children from *The Ark 1* or from both compounds?"

"Both actually," she replied, "Two of the deputies wives were school teachers, but 5 of the people from *The Ark 2*, 4 women and 1 man were also teachers. I think that we would have to integrate the children from both compounds to make it work. To be honest, the idea wasn't originally mine. One of the teachers from *The Ark 2* gave me the idea."

"Just say the word and we can have 4 classrooms up in a day or so," Clarence offered. "I'll put them on the second floor. Ron and Gary, do you want to ride shotgun tomorrow when we go gut a school in Pueblo?"

"Let's wait until Tuesday," Ron suggested, "Tomorrow is Labor Day."

"That's fine Ron, make it Tuesday," Clarence agreed. "But, I want to get back to this cooking school idea. It's just an example of one type of school. I'll bet we could get Chris to teach a class in auto mechanics, someone to teach a class in butchering and or meat cutting, I could teach a class in carpentry; you get the idea, technical training."

"We have every trade covered between the people at *The Ark 1* and *The Ark 2*. It wouldn't be much different from what we've been doing the past 9 years, but, if we are going to formalize our educational program, we should offer the kids a half day of classroom and a half day of technical training."

"If you fellas would like," Jan offered, "I'd be glad to speak to everyone about setting up a school and a technical training program."

"That would be really nice Jan, can some of us help you?" Lucy asked.

"Sure, the more the merrier," Jan replied, "In fact, I think that this would be a perfect project for the Ladies Guild."

"Well fellas," Clarence grinned, "If the Ladies Guild is taking on the school project, it's a done deal. I expect that we had better make sure we get all of the school equipment we need on Tuesday."

"Oh there's no rush Clarence," Lucy said, "School won't be starting until the first Monday

in October.”

It wasn't that the children of *The Ark 1* and *The Ark 2* hadn't been receiving an education. Home schooling had begun as soon as the original compound was finished and there were children of school age. If a parent lacked skills in a particular area, someone else would pitch in to help. When the Sheriff, the deputies and their wives arrived, the two teachers took over the home school program and had for several years provided the instruction.

Jan's goal in all of this was to ensure that her children and the children of the other families received the best possible education. Since there were no more public schools, it was incumbent on each community to prepare the children for life, or college, if they wanted to go. She had heard that the admission standards at the re-established land grant colleges were tough. If she had any say in the matter, Freedom and her two boys would be able to pass the entrance exams with ease; of course that was if they wanted to go to college.

Communities had developed the practice of sponsoring their children at the colleges. Few people could afford the tuition, even though it wasn't high, to put a child through 4 years of college. The system was akin to the military academy system, in that the education was free to the child, but came with an obligation at the end. The sponsored children were expected to return to their settlement and repay the community with their acquired skills on a year for year basis.

September 3, 2013, Pueblo, CO, about noon...

The three old geezers and a group from both compounds had arrived early in Pueblo. Following the directions of the two deputies' wives, the teachers, they had spent the morning gathering textbooks, desks, blackboards and school supplies. After the meeting had broken up at the *Long Branch*, Clarence had sought out the resident who was taking over his carpenter duties and they had stayed up until nearly midnight working out plans to construct 4 classrooms on the second floor of the Community Center. The rooms should be done by the time they arrived back at the compound.

They arrived back at The Ark around 1:30, uh...1330 hours. While the others unloaded the materials from the trucks and brought them to the second floor, Clarence inspected the newly completed classrooms.

“We put insulation in the walls Clarence, to deaden the noise,” Ralph, their new master carpenter said, “We wired the rooms with extra outlets, too. We'll sand off the drywall seams tomorrow and put on a second coat. We'll paint the day after. When the paint dries, we'll hang those blackboards I just noticed them bringing up. The new school rooms will be ready and waiting long before they get the details of the school worked out.”

‘You do some really fine work Ralph,’ Clarence smiled. “When you have some free

time, look me up, I'd like to talk about a project that I have in mind for next year.”

Chapter Seventy-one – Merger

Clarence and Ralph visited a bit about the Nursery that they needed to add to the Hospital.

“Just get with Dr. Moore, Ralph,” Clarence suggested, “And build it to his specifications.”

When the new Doctors had arrived at *The Ark*, the trucks contained more than their possessions and the equipment that the General had promised. They actually had enough drugs and the like to supply the needs of the residents for quite some time. Jamison had told them that should they run low of anything, a call to him would have additional supplies on the way to *The Ark* in a matter of hours.

So, when Ralph approached Dr. Moore about the Nursery, he learned that Moore also wanted him to set up a small Pharmacy. “No problem,” Ralph thought, “There’s plenty of room.”

Lt. General Jamison had not told the residents of *The Ark* a lot of things. Many around the country saw *The Ark* as a model settlement. Other settlements struggled to model their communities after *The Ark*. *The Ark* was the only settlement in the entire country with a zero crime rate. Other settlements experienced a miniscule amount of violent crime and thievery was common. If *The Ark* was experiencing either category of crime, it was the best-kept secret in the country. And, given the stories he’d heard about how open the people were, he seriously doubted that they had any secrets.

Clarence had joined Ron and Gary at the *Long Branch*.

“So, Clarence,” Ron asked, “You have the school up already?”

“I figured we might as well do it Ron,” Clarence replied, “You know how determined Jan can be when she sinks her teeth into something. And then Lucy’s remark was sort of a wifely signal that I’d best get my butt in gear.”

“Tell me some more about what you want to do with the Youth Center/*Long Branch* and the tunnel system,” Gary urged.

“As you know, the original tunnel was built just below the surface,” Clarence reminded the others, “The newer tunnels were built below the frost line; actually, with 10’ of earth over the top. They are wider and taller and use a ramp to enter each building. I want to replace any pole buildings with the stone slip form buildings. It’s like I told you the other night, we need a place for people to get out once in a while. So I figured we could build the new buildings further away from the compound, directly east of the Community Center.”

“Why not just re-build them in place?” Gary asked.

"If we wanted to add another ring of homes around the compound," Clarence explained, "We would have to build around them. If we move them, we will have room to build 3 more rings of homes."

"Do you think that *The Ark* will ever grow that big?" Ron asked.

"I have no idea Ron," Clarence answered, "But I didn't ever think we'd have 88 homes. No, it would be better to plan well ahead. We made some poor assumptions back when we built this place and have had to redo a few things."

"What about the tunnel between the two compounds?" Ron asked.

"I talked to Jacob about it," Clarence answered, "But with things having been so peaceful over the past few years, it wasn't a high priority with him. I would be all in favor of our replacing the old tunnel, but it would probably be a project that we would have to do by ourselves. Jacob said the God would provide for their needs. I thought it said somewhere that God helps those who help themselves. What say fellas, shall we be 'angels' and provide for the needs of our friends and neighbors at *The Ark 2*?"

"I think that we should," Gary responded, "They've always pooled everything they have with what we have. We don't even bother to grow wheat anymore, they grow enough for everyone."

"That's right Gary," Ron added, "Not once since we setup the two compounds has anyone from *The Ark 2* ever once refused to pitch in and work for the good of the settlement. They've helped us build and never asked for anything in return."

"I offered to erect slip form homes over at their compound, but Jacob said that the trailers were just fine," Clarence stated.

"How many homes would we have to build to complete two additional rings?" Ron asked.

"Each ring is 8 homes bigger than the preceding ring," Clarence said. "The last ring had 34 homes, so the next ring will have 42 homes and the ring after that will have 50."

"How many trailers do they have over there?" Gary asked.

"I have no idea," Clarence responded. "We gave them 36 when we built the last bunch of homes. I think that they started out with about 24 and had added some later on. They aren't using all of the 36; maybe they are using 40 trailers, give or take."

"So, if we added one ring, we could house the entire second compound?" Gary concluded.

"I expect so, yes," Clarence replied.

"I know Jacob pretty well from all the time we spent together in Philadelphia," Gary offered, "Let me talk to him about this and I'll get back to you."

Two weeks later, September 17, 2013, Long Branch, 1000 hours...

"How did it go with Jacob?" Clarence asked Gary.

"Good," Gary replied, "I didn't pressure him. It turns out that they have wanted to move over here for some time, but felt that they would be imposing. It also turns out that the mobile homes aren't the best place to live in the winter. It takes too much to keep them warm; the pipes sometimes freeze. Then, when the humidity gets up in to summer, they have to run air conditioning. He wasn't hard to convince at all."

"Why haven't they said something before now?" Ron asked.

"I have no idea," Gary answered. "It doesn't make any difference. They will help as much as they can to build the new homes. Once they're moved over here, we can move all but one of the generators they have to the Community Center basement. The wind turbines can stay where they are. We'll haul the trailers over to the Industrial area and set up a motel of sorts or something. A lot of the land on the south farm isn't tillable, and the land they used for a housing area is. So, we will pick up a few extra acres of tillable ground. It will sure be nice to have the entire community in a single compound."

"What about the tunnel?" Ron asked.

"We still need it to access the Observation Tower in the winter," Clarence responded. "But I think that we should enclose that makeshift elevator and replace that concealed tunnel entrance. Maybe move it over a little so the elevator drops right into the hole. I'll draw you up some plans and show you what I mean."

"Just do it Clarence," Gary laughed, "And we'll look at it when it's done."

October 1, 2013, 2000 hours, monthly meeting...

"I guess that about covers it," Clarence concluded.

"We will supply as much labor and materials as we can spare," Jacob stated. "Our families can begin moving into the homes as they are finished. If we all work together on this, we should be done before Labor Day next year."

"Do you folks want to build a separate Church," Don asked, "Or will you hold your Church Services here in this room?"

"Here in this room will be fine Don," Jacob replied. "And all of you are welcome to attend. We even have several cases of the Book of Mormon, if any of you would like to

read 'Another Testament of Jesus Christ'.

"Is there anything else?" Don asked.

"Yes," Jan spoke up, "School will begin next Monday, the 7th. We had a little problem come up, that's why it didn't begin yesterday. It will run from 8am until noon. The older students will be expected to report to their technical training classes at 1pm and spend 4 hours in that activity. The students will all learn everything that they need or want to know about the system next Monday."

The little problem that Jan spoke of wasn't a little problem. The solution to the little problem was unique, for a 'public' school, to be sure. The old issue of the Theory of Evolution vs. the Biblical Creation had cropped up. Where was Clarence Darrow when you needed him? In the year 1925, John Thomas Scopes was placed on trial in Dayton, Tennessee and was eventually convicted of the crime of teaching the Darwinian concept of evolution and was fined \$100.

Years later, Scopes wrote:

The trial created a better climate for understanding divergent points of view. The intermingling of a great number of people from all over our country (where did they find accommodations?) and the news gathered and sent out by reporters from the North, East, South, and West lowered to some extent the barriers of misunderstanding that separated the different sections of our country. By no means were these barriers demolished but the top rails were removed or splintered.

The trial marked a beginning of the development of a national consciousness of the roles played by religion, science, and education. I think the importance of communicating the thinking of the professionals in these fields to the general public was first generally appreciated during and immediately after the trial.

The solution arrived at by the residents of The Ark was to add teachings of Philosophy and Religion to the curriculum. The Science class would teach the Darwinian concept of Evolution and the Philosophy and Religion class would teach the Creationist Theory. The final settlement to the dispute came when someone said, "The Bible tells us what God did and Darwin attempted to explain how He did it." Apparently this person believed that a Biblical "day" lasted longer than 24 hours.

[Hey, don't blame me, I'm just reporting on what happened, Gary (TOM)]

The meeting was adjourned and the folks sat around for hours visiting about the events planned for the coming summer. Some of the seniors left the meeting and repaired to the *Long Branch*.

"I don't recall ever being in here before," Jacob said. "I suppose the name threw me off."

"It's just a social club, Jacob," Gary explained. "We don't do much drinking here at this compound. Some of us may have an occasional beer or mixed drink if it's not prohibited by our faith, but you won't find a drunkard in the entire compound. We made a few barrels of Bourbon from the first year's crops. The stuff is 9 years old now and it still is sitting in the barrels aging. We might have to open one of those barrels someday and find out if we made anything worth drinking."

"The new *Long Branch Saloon* will have a completely separate bar area, Jacob," Clarence reported, "With no liquor being allowed in the dining room. It will be one step closer to restoring the life we lost in 2004. And, a step forward, not backward."

"With the addition of the new ring of homes," Ron said changing the subject, "We will have a total of 130 homes in 5 rings. This is becoming quite the community. How are you going to manage building 42 new homes plus 2 new buildings Clarence?"

"Three new buildings Ron," Clarence corrected him, "Dismantling and re-erecting the machine shed is at least as much work as erecting a building."

"Why don't you just put up a new building for the machine shed?" Ron asked. "Strip the metal sheeting from the old shed and bulldoze the rest of it. Surely you don't need to recycle the poles, do you?"

"No I don't," Clarence responded. "We'll do it that way."

"Say, did anyone catch that news broadcast on the Armed Forces Net that was talking about the White Supremacist Group?" Gary asked.

"No, why don't you tell us about it Gary," Ron replied.

"It seems that one of the settlements in Oregon was discovered to be a White Supremacist Group," Gary reported, "So far, they haven't tried to spread their philosophy outside of their group and the government has left them alone. The announcer said that it appeared that the group was pulling up stakes and moving to a new location."

"I thought all that crap died out years ago," Clarence snorted.

"Now honey," Lucy said, "Don't get yourself all worked up."

"Yeah Lucy, I know," Clarence acknowledged his wife, "But we haven't had to deal with anything like that in years. When the Army wiped out the Bloods and Crips in LA, I thought we'd seen the last of racism in this country. All I can say is that bunch had better not move into our area of the country. By God, the Tenth Calvary will ride again if they do."

Not only was the Oregon group White Supremacist, they were militant and armed to the teeth. Over 99.9% of the settlements across the country were fully integrated and race

relations were never an issue. The SARS epidemic had proven to everyone that regardless of their ethnic origins, people were just people.

The period of reconstruction was over and the country was enjoying a slow but steady population growth. There were jobs for everyone who wanted to work and since you didn't eat if you didn't work, everyone wanted to work. The United States of America had essentially become the utopian society that its founders had perhaps hoped for.

Why was there always dirt that had to be swept up?

Chapter Seventy-two – Clarence

Thanksgiving and Christmas came and went. Ralph helped Clarence draw up the plans for the new Youth Center and the new *Long Branch Saloon*. They had decided that Ralph would be in charge of constructing the new homes. Another of the carpenters would build the new machine shed with a small crew.

Clarence had the *Long Branch* and Youth center projects. Everyone would pitch in and remove the metal siding from the machine shed, and Youth Center/*Long Branch*. The siding from both would be enough to side and roof the new machine shed. The machinery would be moved to the north farm and left sitting in the open, a little rain wouldn't hurt it. The contents of the Youth Center and the *Long Branch* would be placed in one of the now empty trailers that had been sunk into the hill to the west of the creek. The plans were all set; all they needed was a break in the weather.

They got their break and construction officially began on Sunday March 23, 2014. During the course of a single day, the machinery was moved, siding removed and the contents of the Youth Center/*Long Branch* were stored. The next day, grading began for the homes. Clarence's plans included putting basements under the two new buildings he was in charge of and both were excavated that week, as well as the ditches to hold the tunnels connecting the Youth Center to the *Long Branch* and the *Long Branch* to the Community Center.

Building the larger tunnels was the easiest part of the project and only 4 men were assigned to that task. Two crews of 12 persons each labored to erect the slip form basement walls. The estimated time of completion of the exteriors of the two buildings was 5-6 weeks.

A much larger crew of nearly 100 persons were working on the new homes; so many, in fact, that the homes were being built in groups of 7. The estimated time to completion was 6 weeks for the homes, an average of one home per day.

Chris and Matt had hauled a truckload of 8'x4'x1" plates to the Observation Tower. The plates were hoisted into place and the seams welded. They were moving upward at the rate of 16' per day since both were welding.

When the tunnel builders had completed the tunnels between the Youth Center/*Long Branch*/Community Center, they moved to the Observation tower and dug a 12' square hole 20' deep. They poured two tunnel sections and set them on end, forming a 10'x14' square box that was 10' high. They then added a foot of gravel to the inside of the box and poured a slab floor.

Chris was getting dizzy from working so high off the ground; so another person was brought in to take his place. He added plates to the bottom of the 4' square shaft and extended the shaft downward into the concrete box. While he did that, a doorway was sawn out of the concrete box and a small tunnel was constructed over to and under-

neath the main tunnel. A hole was sawn in the floor of the old tunnel and the two tunnels were connected using a short piece of culvert.

When Chris was done, a slab was poured to enclose the box and the area above it was back filled and covered with sod. Chris then fashioned a steel ladder which the construction crew hauled all the way back to the compound and all of the way down the tunnel to the trap door in the floor. (Poor planning on their part, they poured the slab too soon.) They raised the trapdoor and installed the ladder. The trapdoor was counter balanced to permit the tremendous weight to lift easily. The same type of locking arrangement was used for the new trapdoor into the tunnel as had been used before.

It took a total of 13 days to construct the square steel shaft all the way up the tower to the Observation Platform. Matt and Chris had actually argued about the project, Matt insisting that it didn't make any sense to make a fire observation platform as secure as Fort Knox.

Chris said that maybe it didn't make any sense, but it didn't hurt anything and getting in and out of the tower was a tough during a storm. Matt countered that it didn't make any sense to even man the tower during a storm. He shut up when Chris pointed out that a lightning strike, which could start a forest fire, was very likely to occur during a storm.

When Chris and Matt were done with the tower project, the tunnel builders joined Clarence's crew working on the Youth Center and the *Long Branch Saloon*. Clarence took the time to drag Chris and Matt to the kitchen in the Community Center and pointed out various appliances and shelving and the like that he needed for the two buildings.

It took the two of them several days, with help, to locate the pizza ovens, deep fat fryers, stoves and stainless steel counters and haul them all back to The Ark. By the time they were done, they were able to unload the appliances and set them up in the two buildings. The popcorn popper had migrated from the main room of the Youth Center to the Community Center. Clarence sent them back to Pueblo to get two more popcorn poppers, one for the Youth Center and one for the bar room at the Long Branch.

Clarence was now 75 years old and he sometimes tended to forget things. He wasn't as bad as Gary, who was now wrapped up in recording the history of *The Ark*, at least he knew what day of the week it was; but it was sometimes humorous.

"Clarence, we're back," Chris smiled, "Where do you want them?"

"Where do I want what?" Clarence asked.

"The popcorn poppers," Chris replied.

"What popcorn poppers?" Clarence asked, totally befuddled.

"The popcorn poppers that you sent Matt and me to Pueblo to get for the *Long Branch*

and the Youth Center,” Chris said, starting to lose it.

“OH, those popcorn poppers,” Clarence said remembering, “Why in the *Long Branch* bar and the Youth Center, of course.”

“Uh...duh,” Chris thought, “I knew that you old fart. We’ll just set them inside the doors and he can move them where he wants them himself.”

Clarence was very embarrassed. He also had one hell of a headache. He had been focusing so hard on an entirely different matter that he’d completely forgotten about the poppers. His conversation with Chris was almost as stupid as the old Abbott & Costello routine, “Who’s on First.” He guessed that it was time to hang up his hammer.

That evening, he had a talk with Lucy. Since the houses were nearly done and all that was left to do was put the roofs on his two buildings, she suggested that he talk to Ralph about it. Maybe Ralph had someone who could take over for him and finish up the two buildings. Clarence complained of his headache and went to bed early. Lucy called Fred.

“Fred,” She said, “This is Lucy. I’m worried about Clarence.”

“What seems to be wrong Aunt Lucy?” Fred asked.

“Clarence came home today from the project really upset,” Lucy said, “But I noticed that his speech is a little slurred.”

“What happened at the project?” Fred asked.

“He had a memory problem,” she said, “Sent Chris to town and then forgot he did it.”

“And you say his speech is slurred?” Fred asked.

“Yes,” Lucy replied.

“Did he eat any supper?” Fred continued.

“No, he said he said wasn’t hungry,” Lucy replied.

“Did you notice anything else?” Fred asked.

“Well he said he had a terrible headache, so I gave him aspirin and he went to bed,” Lucy replied starting to become alarmed.

“Aunt Lucy,” Fred said, “Jan and I will be right over.”

Fred yelled to Jan and told her that Clarence was sick. He then called the security office

and told them to find Dr. Moore and get him over to Clarence's home. He grabbed his bag and they headed for Clarence and Lucy's home.

As they hurried to Clarence's, he ticked off the symptoms Lucy had unknowingly described, acute headache, slurred speech, memory loss, and possible nausea. Sounded like a possible stroke to him. When they got to Lucy's, Jan stayed with Lucy and he went in to check on Clarence. Clarence had vomited. He quickly took Clarence's blood pressure. 195/120. Whoa! Just then Dr. Moore entered the residence.

"What do you have, Fred?" Moore asked.

"Looks like a stroke," Fred said, "BP is 195/120; vomiting, acute headache, memory loss and slurred speech."

"I'll have them bring a gurney; you establish an IV with normal saline and give him a 10 mg labetalol bolus. Then establish a labetalol drip at 2 mg/min," Moore directed as he left the room to make the call to security.

Fred already had the IV admin set out of his bag and was establishing the IV before Moore began to rattle off his instructions. The gurney arrived while Dr. Moore was on the phone; apparently the security office had sent it on their own. They transported Clarence to the Hospital, cleaned him up and kept him under observation. His blood pressure was coming down nicely.

"What I wouldn't give for a CT scan or an MRI, right now," Dr. Moore said. "Well, we practiced medicine without them for a lot of years and I guess we'll have to do so again."

"Where the nearest unit with either one?" Fred asked.

"Ft. Carson," Dr. Moore replied.

"Well, what are we waiting for?" Fred asked Dr. Moore.

Don was coming in the door to check on Clarence.

"Don, call the General and have him send a helo to pick up Clarence," Fred instructed, "Dr. Moore says he really needs an MRI or CT scan."

"I'm on it!" Don said running to the Communications center.

"You see Dr.," Fred explained, "Back when Lt. General Jamison was a Lt. Colonel, Clarence..." Fred told of an incident that, to the best of his knowledge only a few people and now Dr. Moore knew about. It had been something that Clarence had said when they explained the then Sgt. Olsen's absence from the Army for a while when the balloon went up. Fred didn't even know exactly what it was, all he knew that Jamison really

liked his uncle.

Don stuck his head in the door, "The helo's on the way, ETA 25 minutes."

"I don't think this is a particularly bad stroke," Dr. Moore said, "Maybe minor, but it's always better to be safe than sorry."

The helo arrived right on time. Dr. Moore accompanied Clarence to Ft. Carson and Fred remained at *The Ark* to handle any other emergencies that came up. About 2 hours later, the phone rang at Lucy's. It was the security office wanting to speak to Fred. It seemed that Dr. Moore was correct and the stroke was extremely minor. Clarence and he would be back to *The Ark* in maybe 5 days. Fred reassured his Aunt Lucy that Clarence was doing fine. He gave her a sedative and sent her off to bed. He headed to the security office that was the temporary refuge of the three old geezers.

"How's Clarence?" Ron demanded the moment Fred entered the security office.

"He awake and doing fine." Fred replied. "The MRI showed a very minor tear. The aspirin that Lucy gave him may have really been a Godsend. Anyway, he should be back here in 5 days. I'm counting on the two of you to sit on him if you have to, he's done working for a living."

"Thank God," Ron said, "Don't you worry Fred, Gary and I will see that he does what he's told to do. What do you think caused this?"

"Knowing Clarence," Fred replied, "He probably got too focused on what he was doing and completely quit taking his Diovan. His blood pressure crept up and eventually ruptured a small vessel in his brain. Feel free to nag him from now on about his blood pressure medicine."

"We will do that," Ron and Gary agreed.

"What's the chance that we could drive up and see him?" Ron asked.

"Don't get me wrong fellas, but Derek is there and General Jamison is there," Fred reminded them, "That's probably about all the company he can handle for the moment."

Chapter Seventy-three – The Plant

Clarence returned to *The Ark* on April 15, 2014. His stay had been just a little longer than they first thought. The beauty of the thing was that he was gone over by the Army doctors from head to toe. Aside from numbness in two fingers, he was fine. The doctors told him that he should recover feeling in those two fingers in time.

He looked fit, having lost about ten pounds. His small stroke had done wonders for his two friends who were taking their prescription drugs timely and walking a mile a day. It was just ½ mile from the compound to the Observation tower. Every morning at 0900, rain or shine, Ron and Gary walked to the tower and back. Actually, Ron walked to and back. Gary walked to and mostly staggered back, but he did it despite the pain in his feet and back.

The houses, Youth Center and the *Long Branch Saloon* and Restaurant were completed and open when Clarence returned. Ron and Gary were sitting in the Saloon when they received word that Clarence was back. They headed for his house the minute they heard.

“Hey you old fart,” Ron said, “Doggone, it’s good to see you Clarence. How are you feeling?”

“Hi Ron, Hi Gary,” Clarence greeted them, “I’m feeling a lot better now. I’ve never been poked and prodded so many different ways in my whole life.”

“What happened,” Gary asked, “I know that you had a stroke, but I mean, what brought it on?”

“I just got so wrapped up in my projects; I was working 16 hours a day and kept forgetting to take my medicine,” Clarence replied.

“That’s what we suspected,” Gary said, “Are you going to take it easy now?”

“Doctor’s orders,” Clarence smiled. “Did they get everything finished?”

“Ahead of time,” Ron replied. “The finished the houses two days early and a herd of 100 people descended on the Long Branch and the Youth Center. Had them set up in two days. We just got to go into the Saloon this morning. In fact, we were there when we heard that you were home.”

“How’d it come out?” Clarence asked.

“Partner, it’s great,” Ron complimented Clarence.

“Clarence I like the idea of a waiting room with the seating in the center and the gun cases along the walls,” Ron continued, “Everyone can see them without entering either

the restaurant or the Saloon. Having the pool table in the L shaped extension to the Saloon essentially hides it from view. So, when you walk in the door, it's just like walking into the *Long Branch Saloon on Gunsmoke*."

"I like those tables you picked for the restaurant," Gary offered, "Those flip up leaves change a table from seating four to seating eight instantly. I can hardly wait for them to start serving meals."

"I'm glad you like it," Clarence said softly.

"So, are you going to be able to go with us for walks in the mornings?" Gary asked.

"Not just yet Gary," he answered, "But as soon as Dr. Moore says it's ok, I'll join you."

"You didn't get any paralysis, right?" Ron confirmed.

"Just the little finger and ring finger on my left hand," Clarence replied, "They are a little numb. I did hear an interesting rumor while I was at Ft. Carson."

"Oh?" They replied.

"You remember that White Supremacist Group we heard about back around the first of October?" he asked.

"Yeah I remember," Gary said, "I told all of you about hearing it on the Armed Forces network."

"I heard that they may have found them," Clarence announced.

"Oh? Where?" Ron asked.

"You ever heard of Durango?" Clarence asked.

"Do you mean Durango, Colorado?" Ron asked, startled.

"That's the place," Clarence said, "But, it was just a rumor, I don't know how true it is."

"Sheesh," Ron said, "As the crow flies, that about 200 miles west-south-west of here. But it is on the other side of the mountains. Do you think we have anything to worry about?"

"I asked Derek," Clarence said, "But he was really tight lipped. I tried to get him to tell me anything, but he wouldn't say a word. Kind of unlike him, if you ask me."

"I'll ask Don to check with General Jamison," Ron said.

“Don’t bother,” Clarence retorted, “He came to see me this morning before I left. I flat out told him about the rumor I had heard and asked if it were true. He stonewalled me. All he did was ask where I’d heard that then shrugged his shoulders.”

“Clarence, we’d better let you get some rest,” Ron said rising, “You come by the *Long Branch* as soon as you’re able. We’re usually going to be there by 9:30 or so. Let’s go Gary.”

After they’d left Clarence’s, Ron turned to Gary and said, “I don’t like this one bit! It’s not like John to stonewall us. And I can’t believe that Derek wouldn’t say anything to Clarence.”

“Let’s ask Don and Herb to meet us at the *Long Branch*,” Gary suggested, “Four heads are better than two.”

April 15, 2014, noon, Long Branch Saloon...

Ron finished repeating what Clarence had told Gary and him to Herb and Don.

“I know that it’s not like they’re down the road or anything, assuming the rumor is true,” Ron concluded, “But I’ll have to tell you it makes me nervous.”

“I have to agree with you Ron,” Herb said, “But this isn’t 10 years ago. We are all a lot older now for one thing. We have a whole new cadre of LRRP’s, but they’ve never had any actual experience. Most of us with experience haven’t seen any action since the Trinidad affair. That was what, 6 years ago?”

“Spring of 2008,” Ron confirmed, “I know none of us can do it, but we have a Local Militia, and a National combined force. Plus, we have our small group of Special Forces or LRRP’s if you prefer. It just seems to me that we shouldn’t have to be in an information vacuum. Don, do you think it would do any good for the four of us to drive up to Ft. Carson and see General Jamison?”

“If he wouldn’t say anything to Clarence,” Don replied, “I doubt it. But what the hell do we have to do that’s any more important? I’ll give him a call and see if he will see us. Give me a few minutes; I’ll be right back.”

Don put in a call to General Jamison. Sure, Jamison would be glad to see them, was 0900 tomorrow too early? Don assured him that it wasn’t and that they would be there on time. He returned and told the men.

April 16, 2014, Ft. Carson, Lt. General John Jamison’s office, 0900...

“So tell me, how is Clarence doing?” John asked.

“He was fine last night John,” Don replied, “He was sleeping this morning, so we didn’t

disturb him.”

“All he needs is rest according to the Doctor’s,” John said, “They told me that he was going to have to try and avoid oversteering himself for a while so his body can heal up. That’s why I didn’t say anything to him about the White Supremacist Group. I assume that’s why you’re here, correct?”

“Yes sir,” Don responded. “Clarence told us about the rumors he heard and said neither Derek nor you would talk about it. That sort of got us concerned.”

“Gentlemen, Colonel Olsen was under my direct order not to discuss the matter with Clarence,” John stated, “So, don’t blame him. I was trying to follow the Doctors’ advice and not upset him. What would you like to know?”

“What can you tell us about that group?” Ron blurted out.

“We lost them for a little while last fall, early winter, but we picked them up soon enough,” John began. “So far, they haven’t bothered anyone. I don’t really think that will last for much longer, though.”

“Oh?” Don responded.

“Do any of you remember the disinformation trick the Allied Forces pulled on Hitler before the Normandy invasion?” John asked.

“Which one?” Herb asked back.

“The one where they took a cadaver and fitted him out with false papers?” John replied.

“Major Martin or something like that?” Herb asked.

“That’s the one,” John said. “It gave us an idea of how to infiltrate the group. One of our Sergeants was killed in a training accident. It was unfortunate, but it gave us an idea. The Sergeant happened to be a black man. We gave one of our LRRP’s a superficial beating and planted him and the dead man on a road about a mile in front of one of their advance groups.

“To make it look legitimate, that poor soldier ended up getting sapped. Anyway, their advance scouts found our LRRP lying next to the body of the dead Sergeant, who happened to have the soldier’s knife sticking out of him. They jumped to the obvious conclusion and took our man in.”

“So, you have an inside man?” Herb confirmed.

“Yes and no,” John said, “He’s in, but apparently, they haven’t totally accepted him. Anyway, we put a transponder in the heel of his boot, so we know where he is at all times.

He can adjust the transponder signal by moving the nails in his boot heel. So far, he hasn't changed the setting."

"What does that mean?" Herb asked, "Are you sure he's still alive?"

"He's still alive and HE is still wearing his boots," General Jamison laughed. "That pair of boots is probably the most expensive pair of boots in this man's army. Believe me, if anyone else were wearing the boots, we'd know. Anyway, once he's accepted, he'll move a nail and begin transmitting a different response. If he has any urgent information and needs to be extracted, he will move another nail and we'll pull him out."

The General turned and turned on a TV sitting behind his desk. The tube slowly came to life and displayed a picture similar to the picture Lloyd's miniature camera on the sailplane displayed. This picture was much sharper, however.

"That's a camera aboard an R-45A Aurora," Jamison explained. "The man in the center of the picture is our guy."

"How high is that UCAV flying?" Herb asked.

"About 25,000 feet," Jamison smiled, "They can't even pick it up with radar; so they have no way of knowing it's there."

"How long have you had this operation in effect?" Don asked.

"Over 5 months," Jamison said, "Do you see the yellow dot in the lower left hand corner of the screen? When it changes to green, he's accepted. If it changes to red, we need to extract him quickly."

"Do you have any other assets in the area?" Herb asked.

"We have a 4 man LRRP about 5 miles south of Durango," Jamison acknowledged, "We don't dare get any closer; this bunch of guys is really uptight."

"What are you going to do if they decide to pull something?" Herb asked.

"The same as Trinidad, why?" Jamison inquired.

"This time add napalm," Herb suggested.

Jamison laughed. "We might. It would depend where they were when we bombed them. Anyway, you have your heads up. I don't think that you need to do anything at this time. So far, they haven't broken any laws and we can't attack them just because of what they think. If anything goes down, we'll let you know. Now, before you share any of this information with Clarence, I insist that Dr. Moore ok it. If he gets wind of any of this before the Doctor says he can handle it, I come down there and personally kick the SOB

who leaked it all the way back to Ft. Carson myself. Any questions?"

"No sir, and we thank you for your time and the information," Don responded.

The men bade the General goodbye and returned to their truck for the drive back to The Ark.

"Just what is it between General Jamison and Clarence?" Don asked.

"None of us know Don. It goes back to the day that Derek was brought up here to see General Robinson about being AWOL," Ron said. "Gary and I have probably asked him 100 times and he always just smiles and says it's no big thing. He lying, of course, but I guess it's just none of our business."

Chapter Seventy-four – Change of Command

Despite what General Jamison had said, Herb didn't want to take any chances. It had been at least 4 years since they had stopped having the Yellow Alert drills. He drafted a hand bill and ran off 150 copies on the HP 4in1. He got a teenager to deliver one to each home and post one on every bulletin board at The Ark.

He planned on resuming the no notice Yellow Alert drills at any time beginning 48 hours after the date and time on the notice. Within the hour, his phone in the security office began to ring incessantly. He decided that the best way to handle this situation was to ask Don to call an emergency meeting for that night. He recorded a message on his voice mail and set the phone not to record messages, just deliver the announcement.

April 16, 2014, 1900 hours, Community Center...

Herb carefully and patiently explained the situation to the residents. Clarence and Lucy were strangely absent. He pointed out that there was no real reason for concern but since they had let security slide, they were resuming the no notice Yellow Alerts. In addition, everyone, age 14 and up was required to re-qualify with their firearms. Some of the seniors weren't too happy with that, especially the older women. Nevertheless, he insisted, this was how they had managed to survive during the first years after the trouble came and, by God, they would get themselves back up to the previous level of preparedness.

The older people understood; they didn't like it, but they understood and would comply. Surprisingly, it was the younger people who had the most trouble with the idea. It seemed to him that they'd had this discussion a few years back, so he went over how it had been before and how it had to be now.

The firearms training was part of the school curriculum for children ages 14 and up, so they wouldn't mind getting to go to the range instead of busting the books. He would offer a refresher course in firearms handling for anyone who wished to attend. The signup sheet was already on the bulletin board.

The security fence had been torn down when the new houses were built, so he directed that the construction crews start rebuilding the 2' thick, 10' high fence with gun ports. The fence was to include the Community Center, Long Branch, Youth Center and the housing compound. They would begin fencing the Industrial area after the compound was secure. He then opened the meeting to questions.

No, they didn't really expect an attack. Yes, the fence was necessary despite the previous question. No, they were not going to resume the patrols just yet. Yes, the Observation tower was now going to be manned by four persons 24/7 commencing immediately, the schedule was posted. Yes, the model airplane patrols were being reestablished. Yes, all trips away from *The Ark* would now require an armed escort. Yes, the convoy procedures were being resumed. Yes, residents should plan of having their firearms

handy at all times. And yes, the Militia training schedule was being expanded significantly. A few dozen questions later, the grilling stopped.

Ron and Gary were sitting in the *Long Branch* after the meeting. They decided that it might be a good example for everyone if they dug out their western duds and started wearing their Colts. Although they were exempt from having to participate in any of the activities due to their age, they would make a point of being at the firing range every day practicing. Gary said that it would be more fun than walking anyway. The underground firing range still saw a lot of usage. Ron and Gary were pretty darn good shots with those silenced Mark II's.

Ron decided to call it a night. Gary had a cold and couldn't sleep; he went home and worked on his story until 2am. He was up once during the night for potty break and then back up at 6:30am coughing and hacking. He was tired, but couldn't get back to sleep; he decided to stay up and work on his history of *The Ark*.

He wrote for a couple of hours, then showered and put on his old cowboy clothes. He strapped on the .45; it seemed heavier than before. He got the Winchester out of his gun safe and headed for the *Long Branch* for coffee because he didn't want to wake Sharon. He had been there for a while when Ron showed up. Ron and he had a cup of coffee and headed for the range, which was right behind the Community Center.

"You look bushed partner, short night?" Ron asked.

"It's this damned cold," Gary lamented, "I took some Sudafed to keep my head clear and then couldn't sleep. I was up pretty late and then got up early. Guess I should have taken an extra sleeping pill."

They were firing their Winchesters when a group of youngsters and a teacher joined them at the range. The kids were really surprised at how well the old men could shoot. It gave them goal; if these old men could shoot that well, they had better do a lot of practicing. Ron and Gary left soon to check in on Clarence.

"Good morning fellas," Clarence greeted them, back to his usual cheerful self.

"How are you feeling this morning Clarence?" Ron asked.

"I'm feeling good," Clarence replied, "You fellas been to the range?" Clarence asked noting the hog legs and Winchesters.

"You bet," Ron said, remembering Jamison's warning, "We hadn't shot in a while, and decided to make sure the Winchester's were still sighted in."

"Wish I could join you," Clarence said, "Damn these doctors."

"You said you were going to live for another 100 years," Gary reminded Clarence,

“There will be plenty of time for shooting.”

“Tell me something,” Clarence wanted to know, “We started construction March 23rd. Ralph was putting out a house a day. How did they get the houses done so quickly?”

“The day after your stroke, everyone from *The Ark 2* was over here helping build the homes,” Ron explained. “They set a new record for this place, 42 homes erected in 22 days. Then about 100 people pitched in and finished your project in 2 days. They are all moved in now. Oh, and Herb decided to rebuild the fence encircling the compound. They’re working on that now, using material we’re hauling in.”

“Why are they doing that?” Clarence asked suspiciously.

“Well,” Ron lied, “Seeing what a good job you did with the Community Center, the *Long Branch* and the new Youth Center, Herb decided to restore the fence out of a sense of nostalgia. He’s even having them recreate the gun ports.”

By the first of May, the fence was up and Herb had the Claymores setup. The Militia was re-planting the minefield. Chris and Matt had the 1” shutters fashioned for the new buildings. The farmers were in the fields planting this season’s crops and the Ladies Guild was putting out the plants started in the greenhouse. Everyone had acclimated themselves to the pre-Yellow Alert stage that had been reinstated. Dr. Moore had said that Clarence was mostly recovered and ended his confinement. The men could bring Clarence up to date, since there was no hiding the heightened state of readiness from the sharp eyed old man.

May 2, 2014, Lucy and Clarence’s home, 0900...

“Come on partner,” Ron smiled at Clarence, “You’re a free man. Let’s get our butts over to the range and blow the dust out of that Winchester of yours.”

Seeing Gary and Ron duded up in their ‘cowboy’ clothes, Clarence donned his, put on his Colt and got his Winchester. They rode over to the range in a golf cart and began to shoot. When the 9th through 12th grade children showed up at the range, Clarence knew something was amiss. He kept his mouth shut, figuring that he’d give Ron and Gary until noon to come clean. When they had finished shooting, they drove the golf cart over to the *Long Branch*. Clarence looked around as they entered; it was the first time he’d seen the completed facility.

“Came out better than I expected,” he said as they entered the Saloon and sat down for coffee. “I’ll have herbal tea,” he said, “Coffee isn’t good for my blood pressure.”

“Partner,” Ron began, “We haven’t been totally honest with you.”

“I knew it!” Clarence responded, slamming his palm on the table. “It’s that blasted White Supremacist Group, isn’t it?”

“Now Clarence, calm down,” Gary urged. “Yes, it is the White Supremacist Group. They are in Durango just like you heard. So far, they haven’t done a single thing that would allow the National military to move against them. Jamison has been able to infiltrate their group and he has an Aurora keeping tabs on them 24/7.”

“The General said that we didn’t have to respond to the situation,” Ron went on, “But, you know Herb. We’re on a heightened state of readiness now. The minefields are going back in and everyone is keeping their weapons handy. Jamison will give us plenty of advance warning if anything goes down. And, Derek has the Regiment of Abrams on alert so we’re pretty secure.”

“But why did everyone lie to me?” Clarence asked.

“I guess it’s because we love you,” Ron snorted, “You danged old fool.”

“If you’re done with your tea,” Ron said gently, “Let’s get on that golf cart and tour the whole compound.”

The modified Golf cart would sit 4 people. It even had a gun rack! They climbed aboard and circled the perimeter of the compound. The place was huge compared to what they had built back in 2004. The guard towers were gone, having been replaced by ground level positions for the Ma-Deuces. Clarence noted with an approving eye the construction of the new fence. Either he was getting slower or they were building a lot faster.

When they finished touring the perimeter, Ron steered the cart into the compound and they toured the interior. Every single house was identical; it looked like a housing tract. And, Chris and Matt had steel shutters on the windows and doors. Clarence was getting tired, so he had them drop him off at his home. Ron kept Clarence’s Winchester to clean it for him. Clarence went into his home, sat down in his easy chair and napped.

Gary and Ron went over to the Community Building to check in with the security office. Jamison had called; the entire message was two words, ‘Green Light’. That was good news. They decided to have lunch at the Saloon. They got on the golf cart and drove to the *Long Branch*. The lunch menu was right out of the 1950’s; Gary had made sure of that. He ordered a California Hamburger.

For those who don’t know, there was a fad that had been popular in Iowa during the 1950’s. A vegetable cheeseburger and French-fries, aka the California Hamburger. Gary had always suspected that it was someone’s attempt to copy the In-and-Out menu.

May and June passed with little notice. The crops were in and growing nicely. The garden was already yielding a good harvest. The Local Militia drills were down to one afternoon a week. Clarence was fully recovered and the three old geezers had been horseback riding several times checking out this and that. The three men were fit as fiddles,

due to a strict exercise regimen that Dr. Moore had insisted that they all follow. The only thing the good doctor had been unsuccessful at was to get them to quit smoking. They were all in their seventies and if they didn't have lung cancer by now, they said, they never were going to get it.

July 4th, 2014...

The men were dressed in their Tenth Calvary uniforms in preparation for the 4th annual Rodeo opening ceremonies. The Army had brought down the usual contingent of 500 or so troops to participate in the festivities. General Jamison was glad to see Clarence looking so fit. They got together off to one side and visited for quite a while. Later, they joined the founder's group who were assembled at one table.

"General Jamison tells me that General Robinson is retiring this year," Clarence announced. "I told him that unless anyone objected, General Robinson and his wife were welcome to that empty house in the fourth ring. Does anyone object?"

"No," came a chorus of replies from the founders.

"Well John, I told you so," Clarence smiled.

"So who is going to take General Robinson's place as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs?" Ron asked.

"The Chief of Staff of the Navy," Jamison answered.

"I thought you might get it," Ron suggested.

"Nope," Jamison smiled, "But the Army is going to need a new Chief of Staff."

"And you're it?" Ron asked.

"Yes, I leave in a month for Philadelphia," Jamison confirmed.

"So who is going to be in command of Ft. Carson?" Gary asked.

"The Commander's position was originally for a Major General," Jamison explained, "But over the past 10 years, we've had anything from a Brigadier to a Lt. General in the position. We have a new Brigadier who will be in command."

"Oh nuts," Ron laughed, "We'll have to break in a new Brigadier."

"Not really," Jamison replied, "I believe some of you already know him. He's a sharp young guy 40 years old, married with three kids," Jamison continued.

"Tell them for God's sake," Clarence interrupted.

“Brigadier General Derek S. Olsen is the new Commander of Ft. Carson,” Jamison announced.

You would have thought that Gary was the new Commander. He received congratulations from all assembled. Derek, Mary and the kids came over to join them in response to a nod from General Jamison.

“Good enough Dad?” Derek asked.

“Just don’t expect me to call you Sir, Derek,” Gary replied beaming.

The change of Command ceremony was scheduled for 15 Jul 14 at 1300 hours and the founders were not only invited to attend, their attendance was expected. It seemed like the 4th of July always held a surprise of one kind or another.

Chapter Seventy-five – The Raid

July 15, 2014, Ft. Carson, CO, 1300 hours...

The Change of Command Ceremony hadn't changed much over the years. Speeches were given, Command was passed, another speech was given and the troops passed in review. Anyway, it was something like that. Gary was so excited for Derek that he really didn't pay all that much attention to the detail.

After the Ceremony, the founders all congratulated Derek and left for *The Ark*. Derek had a full schedule that day and they wanted to be out of the way. They got back to *The Ark* around 4:30pm and gathered at the *Long Branch* Restaurant for a celebration of their own. It was during this meal that Clarence finally broke down and explained his special connection to General Jamison.

"In the early morning of October 25, 1983, the United States invaded the island of Grenada. The initial assault consisted of some 1,200 troops, and they were met by stiff resistance from the Grenadian army and Cuban military units on the island. Heavy fighting continued for several days, but as the invasion force grew to more than 7,000, the defenders either surrendered or fled into the mountains. Scattered fighting continued as US troops hunted down stragglers, but for the most part, the island quickly fell under American control. By mid-December, US combat forces went home and a pro-American government took power.

"Those troops were Army Rangers," Clarence went on. "Jamison was a Lieutenant and my brother was his radio man. They came under fire and my brother shoved Jamison into a ditch, saving his life. The only casualty that day was the radio my brother was carrying; it got shot all to hell. Anyway, when I was saying my part in support of Derek, I mentioned my brother was a Ranger.

"Jamison picked up on it and we visited later. It was an odd coincidence, that's all; but we've been close ever since. Jamison went on to become, well you know...and my brother was killed a few years later in a traffic accident. That the whole story."

"So, being a hero just naturally runs in your family, huh?" Ron commented.

"Hell no," Clarence laughed, "Jamison was in my brother's way and he just pushed him into the ditch and out of his way so he could get in the ditch himself. But don't ever tell General Jamison that."

August 14, 2014, security office, 0900 hours...

"Where's Herb or Don?" the radioman asked the duty security person.

"There around, why?" the security gal asked.

"I have a message for either of them," the radioman replied, "It's flagged urgent and only says 'Red Light'."

Durango, CO is located on U.S. Highway 550, which provides a route to Grand Junction, Colorado to the north, and Farmington, New Mexico to the south. US Highway 160 connects Durango near Flagstaff, Arizona to the west and near Pueblo, Colorado via Interstate 25 to the east. Durango is primarily a resort area hosting (back in 2004) hundreds of thousands of visitors a year.

Most of the 20 thousand residents died off during the SARS epidemic or moved away. Although a beautiful area, it was not the best choice the White Supremacist Group could have made for an operating base. While the city could easily be defended, it could just as easily be bottled up.

The Special Forces soldier carefully made his way south out of Durango and hooked up with the waiting LRRP team. A Blackhawk extracted the group and flew them to Ft. Carson. The soldier reported that this coming Labor Day, September 1, 2014, the majority of the group planned to create a major disturbance at one of the settlements in the Pueblo area to draw the Army out of Ft. Carson to defend the settlement.

It wasn't clear whether they were going to attack the Pueblo West people or *The Ark*. When the military had departed Ft. Carson, a group of about 40 infiltrators was going to seize the gold reserve at the federal bank that now existed at Ft. Carson.

"Won't you be missed from Durango?" Derek asked the Special Forces Sergeant.

"No sir," the Sgt. replied, "One of those fellas was almost a ringer for me; same size and build. I ko'd the guy, changed clothes with him and staged a fatal accident that just sort of accidentally destroyed his face. They will think that I'm dead and that their guy ran off."

"Won't that cause them to change their plans?" Derek asked.

"No sir," the Sgt. replied, "The guy wasn't involved in the planning of the operation in any way and knew none of the details."

"How do they plan to stage this assault?" Derek asked.

"The main body is going to take Highway 160 to I-25 and on to the Pueblo area," the Sgt responded. "The infiltration force is going to take 550 north to US 50, take US 50 east to state 115 and penetrate the post from the west."

"Why wouldn't they all take the northern route, and split up at Florence?" Derek asked.

"They figure that the smaller group would be harder to spot, sir," the Sgt. reported, "If the military would notice anything, it would be the larger group traveling on 160."

“Thank you Sergeant,” Derek said, “Well done. Get yourself cleaned up and grab some chow.”

“Yes sir,” the Sgt. rose, saluted and left.

Derek began issuing orders. “Get on the horn to *The Ark* and those Pueblo West people who moved into Pueblo. Give them both a heads up. Have the Regimental Commander for the tank Regiment report to me. Have the Wing Commander for the bomber detachment report to me. And, have the Air Guard prep their Predators for over flights of Durango. Oh, and get the Commander of our Special Forces in here.”

Pueblo, Co...

When the residents of Pueblo, the former Pueblo West group got the news, they got the radio to *The Ark*. Could they, they wondered, put up at *The Ark* until the trouble passed? Don took the call from Pueblo.

“Of course you can come down here for the duration,” he said, “If you ninnies had accepted our invitation to move in before, you wouldn’t have this problem now.”

Don notified Ft. Carson that the Pueblo West people, a total of 46 families, were temporarily relocating to *The Ark*. This bit of news allowed Derek to modify his plans, slightly.

August 15, 2015, Ft. Carson, CO, General Olsen’s office...

“Colonel Wilson,” Derek said to the Commander of his old Regiment, “I like you to take half of your tank forces to *The Ark*. Set up the other half in an arc facing southward on the southern edge of Pueblo. If everything works out well, your forces won’t have to fire a shot. If any of those people survive the bomber attack and proceed to either location, wipe them out.”

“Yes Sir,” Col. Wilson replied.

“Colonel Weeks, you position your Infantry Regiment in Pueblo with Colonel Wilson’s tanks,” Derek directed. “Your forces will have the responsibility of cleaning up after the bombing and/or tanks.”

“Yes Sir,” Col. Weeks replied.

“Colonel Carlton, how many bombers can you put up?” Derek asked.

“Sir, I can put up 36 F-15E Strike Eagles with MER’s attached to the internal hard points,” Col. Carlton responded.

“Ok Colonel,” Derek responded, “I want those MER’s loaded out with one each CBU-

52B, CBU- 58B, and CBU-71B dispensers, plus one Mk 77 Mod 5 Incendiary. We'll gut 'em, skin 'em, and fry 'em."

"Yes Sir," Col. Carlton replied.

"Colonel Brown," Derek continued, "The job of your Special Forces will be to intercept the infiltrators in Florence."

"Yes Sir," Col. Brown replied.

"Gentlemen," Derek continued, "We have a little over two weeks to get ready. I want you to pull full maintenance checks on all of your equipment. I'll have the crew chief of any aircraft that can't fly and/or the maintenance chief of any tank or transport that isn't 100% ready for breakfast. I lived at *The Ark* for years and that's my family down there. And Gentlemen, I don't want to have to waste our resources questioning any survivors."

Colonel Wilson's tank forces were at 100% and ready to depart on August 26th. They dispersed and set up the two lines of defense as ordered.

August 26, 2014, 1500 hours, The Ark...

As the transporters began to arrive at *The Ark* and unload the Abrams, Herb and Don greeted Colonel Wilson and gave him several copies of the map of their minefield. As an added precaution, the residents had marked the minefield with a ring of stakes with red flags. As soon as the tanks were in place, the stakes were removed.

At the same date and time in Pueblo...

Colonel Wilson's vice Commander directed the disbursal of the tanks in a concave arc on the south side of Pueblo. The Infantry Regiment would arrive the next day.

August 27, 2014, 1200 hours, Pueblo...

The two Battalion Commanders dispersed their companies in Pueblo. The men were told to stand down; it would be 4 days before the attack was expected. A few of the soldiers griped about having to get into the field so far in advance of the anticipated attack. Their Sergeants selected those individuals for guard duty.

August 30, 2014...

The Predators, which had been airborne since the 18th, observed movement out of Durango to the north on 550 and to the east on 160. All units were put on full alert and the Special Forces made the short trip to Florence. All of the Strike Eagles' maintenance checks had been performed and they were ready for their bomb loads. Colonel Carlton, a cautious man, managed to accelerate the maintenance on two planes having new engines installed and, if need be, they could replace any aircraft that wasn't 100% on the

morning of the 1st of September. Both planes had been test flown and had MER's installed.

August 31, 2014...

General Olsen transferred his command to the forward operating area, e.g., *The Ark*. Four F-22 Raptors were on alert at Denver International to provide cover for his planned helicopter flight the next day.

September 1, 2014...

The predators had continually tracked the large Supremacist Group. They were now well north of Trinidad. Derek ordered the bombers scrambled. The evening before, he had talked to his Dad, Ron and Clarence. Did they want to accompany him in his airborne command center the next day and observe the bomber strike? Did they ever! Ok, they could come, but they had better sit down, shut up and just watch.

The command helo arrived to the west of the planned strike area just as the bombers made their first run. While the Raptors circled over the helo, the Strike Eagles made their runs from north to south. By the time they had dropped their loads, there wasn't enough left of the men or their machines to bury. What wasn't blown up was burned up.

Gary, Ron and Clarence couldn't believe the destructive power wielded by the 36 Strike Eagles. For some reason, Clarence seemed to have the biggest grin. A few minutes later, the Special Forces detachment intercepted the 40 infiltrators just outside of Florence. Unfortunately none of the White Supremists survived the first hail of bullets.

The aircraft returned to base. The Tank Regiment and Infantry Regiment were ordered to load up and return to Ft. Carson. Certain of his victory this day, Derek had ordered the mess halls to prepare an elaborate picnic for the returning troops. With the number of barrels of beer he had ordered for the event, it would be a party long remembered.

The residents of *The Ark* already had the barbeque going and as soon as the tanks pulled out, they began to celebrate Labor Day. Before the end of the day, the leader of the Pueblo West group was talking to Don about the possibility of moving his group to *The Ark*. How long, he wondered, would it take them to erect sufficient housing for their 46 families? Was 4 weeks, too long, Don wondered back?

Chapter Seventy-six – Balancing Act

Because the first of the month was a holiday, the Town meeting was held on Tuesday, September 2, 2014. At that meeting the resident's voted in favor of merging the Pueblo West Group into *The Ark*. The people from Pueblo volunteered to supply as much labor as they could, but they didn't have much in the way of materials. One of their problems had continued to be the lack of land within the city limits of Pueblo on which to grow food.

'Continued' because that had been their problem when they lived at Pueblo West and moving into Pueblo only worsened the problem. They had gotten by, barely. One thing they had accomplished was to scour every residence in the city for any useable supplies and they brought along a lot of things, like quart jars for example, that would benefit *The Ark*.

They proved to be willing workers and the 50 new homes in the 6th ring were completed in 26 days. During the construction period, Milt Robinson and his wife Lois arrived and were given their new home gratis by the Association for 'past services rendered'. Then, on the last day of September 2014, a familiar face appeared asking to be allowed to move in to the community.

"Higgs, you old warhorse," Herb said, "I thought you were going to stay in the Army forever."

"I was right up until I couldn't pass my reenlistment physical," the old Sergeant Major confessed. "But what the hell, I had a good tour of duty."

A brief meeting of the membership committee resulted in Higgs being assigned a home in the sixth ring. Higgs had lost his wife to SARS and never had time to 'look for a replacement', as he put it. Derek's home in the 1st ring remained empty so that Mary and he could return to *The Ark* when he retired. They also slapped a reserved sign on the house next to Higgs just in case General Jamison decided to retire to *The Ark*.

With the completion of the fifty additional homes, several of the older resident's began to take stock of their situation there at *The Ark*. The total population was 864. They had sufficient stores of food to supply the entire population, without rationing, for a period of more than two years. Because they had chosen to use only heirloom seed varieties for both their garden and field crops, so long as they could produce even a dismal crop, they would not go hungry. There were even sufficient animal feed stores to tide them through a tough year and the animals could always be put out to pasture.

Thanksgiving Day, 2014, 1700 hours, Long Branch Saloon...

"Man this has been some year," Ron commented.

"Ninety-two new homes and 864 residents," Clarence summarized, "Only thing is, I'm

worried about our supplies.”

“What do you mean Clarence?” Gary asked.

“We don’t have enough ‘electric shingles’ left to make repairs caused by wind damage and the like,” Clarence reported. “Some of those wind turbines need repairs, too. I overheard Chris telling Herb that he didn’t have the parts to repair a couple of the generators.”

“You know,” Gary said, “Dr. Moore went through the drug inventory and some of that stuff is 10 years old. It will have to be replaced, too.”

“We ought to put Higgs in charge of security and free up Herb to address those electrical needs,” Ron suggested. “Let’s face it fellas, we still need to run a salvage operation. We concentrated on pulling in trailers the last time; this next time we need to hit some of the large cities here in this part of the country that we bypassed.”

“Ron we’d better do something to increase our fuel storage, too,” Clarence suggested. “That gas compression project to compress the methane is working too well. We don’t have enough storage for the amount of compressed gas we’re producing. It would be such a waste to have to burn off the gas instead of compressing and storing it.”

The three men stayed up late that night, making lists of things that ought to be accomplished during the coming year. If the winter was mild, perhaps some of the salvaging could be completed and the goods stored until spring. After all, didn’t they have 36 semi tractors and dozens of closed trailers sitting empty? It was better, they thought, that the trailers should be sitting full.

December 1, 2014, Community Center, 1900 hours...

“Is there any new business?” Don asked.

Ron raised his hand.

“Go ahead Ron,” Don said.

“The three of us have been taking stock of our situation,” Ron began. “We feel that there are several things that must be accomplished during the coming year. To start off with, we’d like to nominate Higgs to assume Herb’s job as head of security. Our electrical system needs some serious maintenance and upgrades.

“Since Herb is in charge of everything electrical, he’s going to be really busy this year. We recommend that the wind turbines be consolidated here at the compound. We also recommend that Herb locate additional generators and repair parts for our existing units. What do you think, Herb?”

“We do need the repair parts for certain,” Herb replied, “And relocating all of the turbines to one central location would simplify upkeep. As for generators, I think I know where we might be able to find anywhere from 6 to 12 new units.”

“Good,” Ron replied. “That 12,000 gallon water tank is way too small for a community of 180 homes. If we add another ring, we’ll have 238 homes. Can’t we find a water tower somewhere and move it here to *The Ark*?”

The consensus to Ron’s question was that it might be worth it, depending upon how hard it would be to dismantle a water tower. Someone suggested that if they looked hard enough, they might find one under construction somewhere and could move it to *The Ark*. But, if they did that, would the existing wells pump enough water to keep the tank filled? Maybe they should sink a couple of new wells, too.

“Clarence suggested that we find a sawmill and set it up here at The Ark,” Ron continued, “There’s plenty of trees in the forest to the west. We should be producing our own lumber anyway. Building hardware is a different matter. We need to salvage a couple of building hardware warehouses and load up on supplies, nails especially.”

“We’re out of prefabricated steel building components,” someone commented. “Those steel buildings are a snap to put up. I think that we should scrounge up some more prefabricated sections.”

“Good idea,” Ron responded. “We need to increase our methane storage capacity, maybe to as much as 150,000 gallons. And we need a few truckloads of those electric shingles, too. We don’t even have enough to make repairs.”

The three old geezers went through their list and added some things they had missed as more minds were brought to the issue. People slowly drifted back to their homes after they had contributed any ideas they had to the discussion. The meeting lasted into the wee hours of the next morning. When they finally broke up, they had identified all of their needs for the coming year and possibly for years to come.

February 1, 2015...

The winter had been very mild and the snowfall well below normal. The farmers were actually worried that they could have problems in the coming year. There was plenty of subsoil moisture, but farmers always worry. Herb had started his electrical salvage operation the second week of January. True to his word, he had located an even dozen large gas fueled generators in New Mexico.

They had been unloaded and moved to the basement of the Community Center. He had left on a trip to Palm Springs to recover more wind turbines. During his absence, the twelve Generac MP5G 1000 generators, which would supply a total of 12 megawatts of additional electrical capacity, were installed and brought online.

Meanwhile, a fleet of 20 rigs set out to locate building hardware warehouses. They returned full and left with another 20 empty trailers to pickup up what they couldn't haul, Clarence's electric shingles, insulation, electrical and plumbing fixtures and a trailer load of nails. When they returned, The Ark had 40 trailer loads of building supplies and that didn't include any lumber.

Don had heard, by way of Derek, of a water tower that had been under construction back in 2004. A group set out to see how far along the construction had been. They found the preformed sections of the 100,000-gallon tank neatly stacked and covered with tarps. The tarps were tattered, but the tank sections were in good shape. The construction of the tower to support the tank had just begun and there was little to disassemble. Trucks were dispatched to haul the tower components back to *The Ark* and Chris and Matt began to disassemble the tower sections already installed.

The solution to their methane storage was found on a siding in Colorado Springs, the new Capital of Colorado. A long string of empty gas tanker cars sat on the siding. Using a crane, the tankers were lifted off of the running gear and placed on low bed trailers and hauled back to The Ark. They were left on the low beds until support framework could be constructed in the spring.

When Herb had returned from his trip to Palm Springs, they had stopped in Phoenix and looked around. They located a steel building warehouse stacked to the ceiling with pre-fabricated sections. A fleet was dispatched to transport the contents of the warehouse back to *The Ark*.

April 1, 2015...

The time had come to begin another building cycle. The three old geezers decided that they would go riding each day and keep track of the progress. Every morning they got up, saddled up and rode a circuit, checking on the progress being made. They would ride from the north farm along the line of wind turbines, now three rows deep, and observe the completion of the foundations and installation of the towers. It seemed as if a new tower was going up every day.

Slabs had been poured for 4 huge warehouses and the steel buildings were going up at about the rate of one a week. As the buildings were completed, the trailers were unloaded and the goods transferred to a warehouse. Items that could be stored on the trailers were left on the trailers. By the end of the month, the wind turbines were installed, the warehouses completed and the salvaged goods were where they belonged.

May 2, 2015, Long Branch Saloon, 1115 hours...

Gary walked in and tossed a 3" thick computer printout out on the table where Ron and Clarence were sitting.

"Morning partner," Ron said, "What's that?"

“That is a printout of our inventory of materials and supplies,” Gary replied.

“Whoa, that much?” Ron looked surprised.

“Yes, if there’s anything left in the whole southwest that’s not in one of our storage facilities, I’d be surprised,” Gary laughed.

“Dang, maybe we should build a railroad spur line to the south farm,” Ron suggested.

“We don’t need it, it’s only 3 miles to the nearest set of tracks,” Gary responded, “All we need to do is construct a siding and train station. Anyone know anything about building railroad tracks?”

“No, Clarence replied, “But you’re wrong about that spur line. By the time that we build the switch and lay the siding, we could be half way to our industrial park. I say we build the spur line.”

“Ok, ok,” Gary surrendered, “We’ll build a spur line. You’re in charge of that since it’s your idea.”

“Am not,” Clarence laughed, “Ron’s in charge, he brought it up.”

“Speaking of building,” Gary continued, “Has either of you seen the list of applicants for residence at *The Ark*?”

“No,” Clarence replied, “How many families want in?”

“Over 100,” Gary said.

“Hell!” Ron commented, “We don’t have room inside the compound for more than 58 more homes.”

“And we don’t have a saw mill yet,” Clarence replied, “So we can’t even build those.”

“Yes we do.” Gary replied.

“Yes we do what?” Clarence asked.

“Have a saw mill,” Gary explained. “They located one and are trucking it in now. It has an 8’ blade. Plus they have planers so we can produce finished lumber.”

“But, if we cut down trees now,” Clarence protested, “All of the lumber will be green.”

“Maybe that’s why they cut down so many trees this past winter,” Gary suggested.

“Nobody tells me nothing around here anymore,” Clarence complained.

Chapter Seventy-seven – A New Compound

May 2, 2015, Long Branch Saloon, 1215 hours...

“So, how are we going to handle all of those applications?” Ron asked.

“I’m inclined to say the same way as always Ron,” Gary laughed, “But I think you are making another point. How about we lay out a second compound to the north of the Community Center. We could make it symmetrical with this compound with the Community Center, Long Branch and Youth Center in the middle. We would knock down the fences on the north side of this compound and erect a new fence surrounding the new, bigger compound.”

“There’s no way we can build a whole new compound in one year,” Clarence said emphatically.

“Of course not Clarence,” Gary responded, “But we could build the 58 homes to finish off this compound, erect the fence and pour foundations and slabs for the new homes.”

“Plus put in the utilities for the new homes, Clarence offered. “It’s a good thing that septic system is east of the existing compound, otherwise, we would have to dig it up to put in the second compound.”

“Is that septic system big enough to handle almost 500 homes?” Ron asked.

“Don’t know,” Clarence replied, “But it was built so that it could be expanded further to the east, so it doesn’t really matter. We’ll just double the size of the thing to be certain. The bonus to that is the additional enriched gardening space.”

“Let’s call for an Executive Committee meeting and bring it up,” Ron suggested, “I like the idea.”

May 2, 2015, Long Branch Saloon, 1900 hours...

The Executive committee discussed the status of the current projects. That didn’t take long; all of the projects were complete except for the water tower. The committee agreed with the suggested spur line and with the building a second compound. It would be brought up at the next Association meeting. In the meantime, they suggested why didn’t Clarence talk to Ralph and get Ralph to stake the last row of homes?

When Clarence explained to Ralph about the 7th layer of homes and the possible new compound, Ralph staked out everything. He caught John just in time before the area was to be planted and everyone was grateful that he (Ralph) had gone ahead and laid out the new compound. The Executive committee told Ralph to go ahead and start the last 58 homes, even before the next Association meeting. It appeared that many of the applicants would be accepted and they wanted to get a jump ahead.

Thus while Chris, Matt and a crew manhandled and welded the water tower together, Ralph began putting in foundations and the utilities. By the first of June, when the residents voted to accept 93 new families, the 58 foundations and the utilities were done. After Ralph got the building crews started on the homes, he took his foundation and utility crews over to the new section and began to install the utilities and new foundations and slabs.

June 5th, new section...

Ron, Clarence and Gary were out for their morning ride.

“Would you look at that,” Clarence said pointing to the trenches. “That Ralph will have the utilities installed in a few more days.”

“When is he going to start the septic system expansion?” Gary asked.

“I guess he decided to do that last,” Clarence responded. “That Matt is one heck of a worker, and it’s a good thing too because Chris won’t work that high off the ground. Look at the progress he’s making on the water tower.”

They rode over and looked up. The tank was over two thirds done and they should have it online before the 4th of July.

“What’s the deal with those wells?” Ron asked. “And why did they take down the windmill?”

“Ron, they dug two new wells, both with 6” pipes,” Clarence replied. “Used electric powered pumps on the new wells and replaced the old windmills with electric pumps, too. The capacity of a 6” line is 4 times the capacity of a 3” line. So, we have plenty of water to fill the tower.”

“Why didn’t they just put in one 12” well?” Ron asked.

“Hell I don’t know,” Clarence, snorted. “Something about the flow rate of the aquifer or something like that. Anyways, that’s why they put in two 6” wells so far apart. You want to know about it, go look it up on the net. I’m only a carpenter.”

“I just asked...” Ron mumbled.

The fence on the north side of the compound wouldn’t be demolished until the new compound was fenced. The location of the water tower, directly west of the Community Center forced the relocation of the shooting range so it was moved to the south farm. All things considered, the men agreed that the expansion project was moving very quickly.

July 4th, 2015, The Ark...

Derek, Mary and the kids came in the night before. About 50 truckloads of troops showed up early and helped the residents set up the picnic tables and folding tables. When everything was done, the baseball games began as they did every year. Most of the seniors tended to congregate in a section away from the noise of the games.

“So, Derek,” Gary asked, “What’s new with the National Military these days?”

“Dad, you can’t believe how much things have changed for the military,” Derek responded. “You remember what it was like back in 2004, don’t you? We had troops stationed all over the world; we had 10 aircraft carriers; the Army had 10 divisions and was so short handed that most of the state National Guard units were on active duty.

“Now days, the National Military is down to 4 divisions on active duty. We’re more border police than anything else. Well, make that border police and national police. For all of the heartaches that we’ve gone through, the upside is tremendous. There’s no war on drugs because there aren’t any drugs available. All drug offenses except for simple possession are considered 3rd offenses. There aren’t any ships or planes coming to the US, except for the military.”

“The Navy,” he continued, “Has mothballed all but two carriers, one on each coast. The military academies were all combined into a single academy. Most of those officers are released from active duty after fulfilling their obligation. We have a huge reserve force and could handle anything that came our way. But in the world today, I don’t think that is going to happen.”

“What is the world like today?” Ron asked, “PBS doesn’t have any more news than the Armed Forces Network and we’re starved for information.”

“The northern European countries consolidated,” Derek explained. “The European Union lost France and some other countries, but the surviving countries are pulling together much like we are here in the US. There’s hope that some level of foreign trade will be resumed in the next year or two.”

“The biggest change is here in the US,” he continued, “The really small settlements are merging, just as you folks are doing here. I don’t really know what kind of a label to put on what is happening. Maybe corporate communities.”

“How about Intentional Communities?” Clarence asked.

“Yes, that would be more accurate,” Derek allowed. “The country is becoming a collection of Intentional Communities, each with its own local militia. Most of the communities are fairly self-sufficient. They range in size from about 6 square miles to 25 square miles in size. The large communities have the factories because they have the population. Still, every community has its own agricultural base.”

“No one has put up a satellite in 11 years, so except for the geo-synchronous satellites, most of the space junk has fallen back to earth,” Derek continued. “That’s why none of your GPS equipment works any more. Most of the geo-synchronous satellites have failed too.”

“Let’s eat, I’m hungry,” Ron said.

Indeed, the baseball games were all over and people were lining up to eat. Since elders were more respected than in prior years, the food was brought to the seniors and honored guests. They visited through the meal and thereafter, the three old geezers mounted up to perform their color guard duties for the annual rodeo. As always, they spent the rest of the day at the *Long Branch Saloon*.

“My that Derek is quite the boy,” Clarence said, “Damon, too; that’s a nice new wife Damon has, I like her. That Britney grew up to be quite the looker. She’ll be breaking hearts all over.”

Yes sir, I’m mighty proud of my sons,” Gary said. “Hell, all of our kids turned out better than we ever hoped. I think it may be because of what happened. From the way Derek describes the country, I am proud, again, to be an American.”

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